

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Gather by singing.
Sing the first verse
of “Amazing Grace”.

*Amazing grace,
how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost
and now I'm found,
was blind but now I see.*

Search your pockets, purses, or person for a photo, a key, a piece of jewelry, a membership card that represents a passion you have. Explain briefly what it represents.

LEADER: God, we know you make all things work together for those who love you.

ALL: We know you walk with us as we search for the treasure that is worth spending our lives to claim.

LEADER: Seize us, Holy One. Help us see you in our midst.

ALL: We will know you in the joy among us. Amen.

To what can we compare the kingdom of God in our time? Today many people make pilgrimages to the Magic Kingdom, where fantasies become real. Jesus makes a different move in his teaching. He compares the kingdom of heaven to common, real life experiences.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

A parable links the daily and familiar with the mystery of God that is beyond our knowing. This means our experience cracks open the door to the mystery of God. It means we can encounter God in our daily life.

To make Jesus known, to evangelize, Pope Francis challenges us to create a new language of parables in his exhortation *Joy of the Gospel*. “Be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word, and different forms of beauty which are valued in different cultural settings” (167).

The parables that form Sunday’s gospel are about buying, selling, sorting, and housecleaning, all familiar experiences. Today we live in a far different age and culture than Jesus did. Yet because his parables value our daily life as doors to the sacred, they challenge us to attend to where, when, and how we glimpse the mystery of God in



istock photos

our lives. How is the kingdom heaven like people going and coming on an interstate? How is the kingdom like an intersection? I expected living at a busy intersection to be annoying, but instead it connects me with the rhythms of the working community. I like the morning buzz, the evening hum. The Kingdom of God is like an intersection where everyone meets. And people at the bus stop, who are they?

● **To what in your experience might you compare the kingdom of heaven?**

GOSPEL

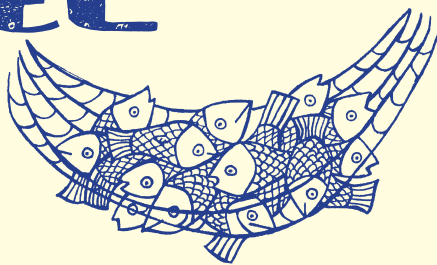
Jesus kingdom is a treasure.

NARRATOR: Jesus spoke to the crowd in parables.

JESUS 1: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

JESUS 2: Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

JESUS 3: Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into



baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all this?

DISCIPLES: Yes.

JESUS 4: Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus lets us reveal ourselves in what we imagine the treasure is. Is it family, spouse, purpose? Is it Jesus?

The parables make most sense if we understand the treasure or the pearl as a relationship. I find a person who becomes an abiding source of joy in marriage. I find a purpose worth my life, love, and energy.

The first Sisters of St. Joseph describe themselves as seized by God's love. The love that seized them not only engaged them wholeheartedly but also revealed a treasure within, a passion for ministering to poor people in their midst.

When African slaves encountered Christianity in America, the gospel delivered a message radically different from the docility slave owners intend to foster. The slaves hear that God loves all people and that Jesus has died and risen to new life for all people—slaves and free. God's love seizes them and gives them dignity.

Black Church grows up around a liberating God who knows and hears the suffering of slaves. The gospel empowers them to sing their suffering and look over Jordan in hope, to resist debasement and work toward freedom

Faith in Jesus costs nothing and everything. To follow Jesus requires a wholehearted commitment to love others as he has loved us. The joy we

What do we value? What gives us joy and life?

Matthew likes to sort. He organizes his gospel like a library. This Sunday for the third Sunday in a row the Church reads from the "P" section in Matthew 13, where the gospel writer places parables.

All three synoptic gospels include the parables of the sower, the mustard seed, and the leaven. However, only in Matthew does Jesus teach the parables of the wheat and weeds, the pearl of great price, and the net full of fish of every kind. Only Matthew likes to

add scary endings, promising evildoers the furnace of fire.

Sunday's gospel begins with two parables about buying and selling. In each, the treasure requires all one has to possess it. The farmer and the merchant make choices so basic that they totally realign their lives and resources. What treasure is worth selling all one has to find joy? What pearl is worth selling everything to possess? What has the farmer found? What is the merchant really looking for?

feel registers the worth of our commitments.

- How has God's love seized you?
- What treasure do you seek? What does it reveal about you?
- What gives you joy?

Matthew never knows when to call it quits. Rather than end the parables chapter with the promising images of the hundredfold harvest and the farmer and merchant who find their treasure, Matthew ends with a net full of fish. Some are worth keeping, some not. It's a parable of warning and judgment. Angels will do the sorting.

Perhaps the community for whom Matthew tells these stories must sort out what to preserve of their Jewish roots as well as what to welcome and what to reject of Gentile practices. The communities of the first century have no blueprint. Like the Church today these Christians live in transition between world views. The temple is gone. Christian communities labor in birth pangs.

What is valuable for bringing people into friendship with God, for building community, for bettering the world? What practices make no difference?

Perhaps people are sorting themselves out in the new Christian communities. Some choose to open their hearts as good ground to receive Jesus'



word. Some choose to spend themselves wholeheartedly as disciples. Perhaps some cannot see in Jesus a treasure worth their lives and wholehearted commitment.

Jesus' parables don't boss us about how to live. Instead the parables challenge us to work on what they reveal to us about ourselves. Parables call us to make judgments, to throw out the useless in our lives and embrace all that gives life.

- What is the treasure for you in being a Christian?
- What is something you no longer need in your life?

Jesus affirms he is training his disciples as scribes for the kingdom of heaven, teachers of his wisdom. He compares their work to a householder who brings out things old and new.

Housecleaning requires endless judgments as anyone who has moved knows. Our next door neighbor sold her house after she had grown too old to cope with moving. Her

towels, vases, plates, the silver, the books—each had a story she wanted to tell before she decided to give the object away, throw it, or keep it.

A move means revisiting the relationships that underpin our lives. How does one throw away a son's gift, now threadbare, without throwing out the relationship?

The Second Vatican Council started a housecleaning in the Church that has continued since 1965. Like our neighbor some believers don't want to lose their connections with the past. Like the bishops of the council many believers want to build relevance for people seeking God today. When new pastors restore liturgy to pre-council times, many leave the parish and may or may not find another.

- What that is new do you value?
- What that is old do you treasure?
- What parables do you tell young people about how they should live?

Solomon seeks wisdom above all other goods.

Unlike his father, David, Solomon grew up in court. David was born in the village of Bethlehem and spent his youth in the open as a shepherd. In fact, Solomon's grandfather, Jesse, had to call David in from the pastures when Samuel came to anoint one of his sons king of Israel.

Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba, enjoyed all the privileges of a favorite son in his father's royal court. Growing up in the intrigue that goes with power, Solomon learned that when he was king he had better kill his enemies as soon as he could. And so he did in the chapter just preceding Sunday's reading.

David spent his reign fighting Philistines and other enemies and securing Jerusalem as his capital. Solomon advanced Israel further toward being a kingdom among other kingdoms. He built a temple and established official worship there. He married an Egyptian

woman to further trade and military alliances. He amassed so much wealth that the great trader, the Queen of Sheba, came from Ethiopia just to visit him and the temple.

Sunday's first reading focuses on Solomon's youth when he made a crucial choice. At 20 with his father dead and the competitors for his father's throne dead, Solomon has a vision in which God asks him what he wants. Solomon chooses wisdom above any other gift God can offer.

Solomon asks for an understanding heart.

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." Solomon replied, "O Lord, my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

1 Kings 3:5,7-12

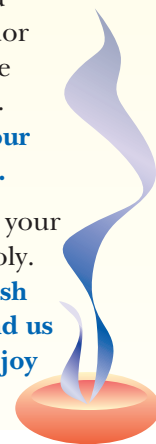
- What did you ask of God as a young man or woman?
- What do you ask for today?

PRAY

Make a commitment to affirm a passion for life and mission that you see in a young person in your life.

LEADER: God, our father and mother, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendor of creation and in the beauty of human life.
ALL: Help us spend our lives on real treasure.

LEADER: Touched by your hand, our world is holy.
ALL: Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us and sustain us in the joy of faith.



Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

DO SOMETHING

C
H
A
R
I
T
Y

J
U
S
T
I
C
E

- Use the sorting theme in the gospel parable to inspire a sorting through your old and new clothes, cooking utensils, furniture, plants, books. Take things to a thrift store or place that supplies refugees and immigrants with household needs.

Visit goodgroundpress.com for daily prayers.