

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a bible and lighted candle at the center of your group with seeds, bulbs, or seeding nearby.

**LEADER:** The hour for the deepest and riskiest of all plantings has come.

**ALL: Transform our self-serving into self-giving.**

**LEADER:** Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

**ALL: Transform our self-serving into self-giving.**

**LEADER:** But if the grain of wheat is planted, it will bear much fruit.

**ALL: Transform our self-serving into self-giving.**

Jesus is about lifting people up—on the last day and every day. Jesus’ resurrection is that promise of new life. Both the bible and Catholic social teaching obligate us to lift up people who are poor, to include our brothers and sisters in our economic and social life.



Social worker and auto mechanic Cathy Heying has created one concrete way to do that—a

nonprofit she started called The Lift Garage. The Lift aims to help low-income people keep their jobs by keeping their cars running. “A car allows a person

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

or a family to meet the basic needs of their lives with dignity,” says Cathy.

The Lift Garage opened in April 2013 with one bay and hours on Saturday only; today it has four bays, four fulltime techs, a mobile van, office staff, and hours five days a week. Social workers refer clients to the garage. Eligible families have incomes at the federal poverty level. The Lift charges \$15 per hour for labor and the cost of parts.

For 15 years Cathy put her degrees in social work and pastoral ministry to work at St. Stephen’s Catholic Church, an inner city parish with the rectory basement turned into a homeless shelter. Many people came to the shelter with the same story. Car broke down. No money to fix it. Couldn’t get to work. Lost job and couldn’t pay rent. Back to the shelter.



“Car trouble can break your budget,” Cathy says. She wondered, “Why isn’t anybody doing something about this? Then I

decided I’m that person.” Cathy enrolled in a two-year program on auto technology, learning humbly beside 18-year-old men. She kept a job as a social justice advocate and put together plans for the garage. Law-school students helped her apply for nonprofit status.

Cathy is not only about repairing people’s cars but also welcoming them while they wait, frequently with their children. She often teaches classes on the basics of car care. More than one news source has featured Cathy’s creative ministry, which helps raise the money it requires to operate each month.

● What is one way you have lifted someone up?



# GOSPEL

## Jesus is like a grain of wheat.



**NARRATOR:** Among those who went up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast were some Greeks. They approached Philip, Jesus' disciple from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request.

**GREEKS:** Sir, we want to see Jesus.

**NARRATOR:** Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip told Jesus about the request.

**JESUS:** The hour has come when the Son of Man will be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it will bear much fruit.

**ALL:** Those who love their lives will lose them. Those who hate their lives in this world will keep them to life eternal.

**JESUS:** If people want to serve me, let them follow me. Where I am, there also my servants will be. Those who serve me, the

Father will honor. Now, my soul is troubled, yet what should I say—Father, save me from this hour? I have come for this hour: Father, glorify your name.

**NARRATOR:** Then a voice came from the sky.

**VOICE:** I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.

**NARRATOR:** The crowd standing around heard the voice and thought they heard thunder. Others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus.

**JESUS:** This voice has not spoken for my sake but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be thrown out. I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

**NARRATOR:** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death he was about to die.

John 12.20-33

and sun, a grain of wheat sprouts into a stalk, grows tall, heads out, and produces new grains of wheat a hundredfold.

The short life cycle of seeds dramatizes all that happens in the longer human life cycle. The planting that we do in loving our children, teaching our students, being faithful in our relationships often takes years to flourish and bear fruit.

● Who sowed the gospel in your life? Who sowed Jesus in your life?

● With what part of the life cycle of seeds do you identify?

The gospel writer John deliberately places the grain of wheat metaphor between two events—Jesus' raising of Lazarus (John 11) and Jesus' washing his disciples' feet at the last supper (John 13). The whole of chapter 12, including the grain of wheat passage, makes a bridge between the first part of John's gospel, in which Jesus works revealing signs, and the second part of the gospel, which tells of Jesus' last supper, passion, death, and resurrection. The life cycle of a grain of wheat anticipates and promises that an abundant yield will germinate and grow out of Jesus' death.

In John 12, Jesus' hour comes. The hour coincides with the feast of Passover. Greek-speaking Jews have come to Jerusalem for the feast. When Philip tells Jesus these pilgrims want to see him, Jesus recognizes that he cannot remain

## Jesus' hour coincides with Passover.

The grain of wheat metaphor in John's gospel uses the transforming process we call growth to help us understand all Jesus' death and resurrection promises us. In the growth process, warmth and moisture swell a seed poked down in the soil until the life secreted within

it bursts its hull. Actually, the seed does not fall into the earth and die but rather germinates. It swells with more life than the seed can hold.

A new sprout pushes above ground into light at the same time roots spread out underground in search of nourishment. With rain

anonymous in the festival crowd. His hour has come.

For John, the hour of Jesus' death is the moment when God will glorify Jesus' name. A dynamic process begins, a passing over, a planting that will bear fruit a hundredfold. In being lifted up—first on the cross and ultimately from the tomb—Jesus will draw all people to himself.

At the heart of Christian faith is Jesus' life-giving resurrection from his self-giving death. In death Jesus entrusts his life to God, the same life-giving Creator that hides the promise of new life in seeds. Jesus' imminent death will no more be an end than Lazarus's death was or than the planting of a seed is.

- How do you imagine your own death? What promise does God hold for you?
- How are your self-giving relationships life-giving for you?
- When has lifting up people's needs in prayer drawn you into helping?

John's gospel couples the grain of wheat metaphor with sayings about discipleship, about hating our lives in this world to keep them to life eternal. These sayings call us to plant ourselves in the Christian community and follow Jesus by serving others. "Where I am, there my servants must be," Jesus says.

What happens at the last supper in John's gospel differs



from what happens in the other three gospels. In John, Jesus does not take bread and wine, bless them, and give them to his friends as a sign of his life broken and poured out for them.

At the last supper in John, Jesus does the work of a household slave when he washes his disciples' feet. Jesus does this as a teacher to give his followers an example of how to treat one another. Serving others is the way to follow Jesus, to plant one's self and bear fruit in the flourishing of a new community.



Today the Church recognizes Archbishop Oscar Romero as a martyr. He was shot on March 24, 1980, while celebrating Eucharist because he spoke out against violence in El Salvador. He hoped his words would bear fruit.

"I have often been threatened with death," he said. "Nevertheless, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people."

"Martyrdom is a grace of God that I do not believe I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon be reality."

- How do you respond to Jesus' example of footwashing at the last supper?
- What seeds of hope are you planting with your life?

FIRST  
READING

## Jeremiah trusts God's power to transform.

Jeremiah tells us that from his mother's womb God appointed him to be a prophet to the nations (1.5). God calls him "to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (1.10).

Jeremiah, who comes from a priestly family, begins his prophetic ministry during the reign of King Josiah, Judah's last great king (627 B.C.). Josiah supports religious reforms that call the Israelites back to the worship of Yahweh alone, but at the same time he tries to forge alliances with Egypt to take advantage of Assyria's weakening power.

In 609 B.C., God sends Jeremiah to preach a sermon in the Jerusalem temple. "Walk in the law, or I will make this temple like Shiloh and I will make this city a curse for all the nations" (26.4,6). As a result Jeremiah gets arrested and nearly put to death for treason.

The prophet seeks to uproot the spiritual complacency of the people of Jerusalem. He wants them to place their trust in God rather than political alliances because alliances mean accepting the gods of the allies. He insists God will spare the city and the temple if the people keep the law.

Jeremiah wears a yoke to show that Babylon, the emerging superpower, will make Judah its vassal. He smashes pottery to show what God will do to Jerusalem. He gets thrown in a cistern and left to die. All this happens because he threatens

the ruin of the temple, the sign of God's presence among the people.

However, Jeremiah not only uproots, he also plants hope in God's faithfulness. During the Babylonians' siege of Jerusalem, he buys a plot of land near his home village. He invests in Israel's restoration, just before the city falls and is destroyed.

In Sunday's first reading, Jeremiah promises God's faithfulness as the people face national ruin. God will plant new hearts in the people and restore in their spirits the possibility of keeping the covenant as a relationship with God.

## A New Covenant

**The days are coming, says the Holy One, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant, though I was their spouse, says the Holy One.**

**This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Holy One. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends**

**and kinsfolk how to know the Holy One. All, from least to greatest, will know me, says the Holy One, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

● **What law do you find written in your heart? Who is its origin?**

● **What yoke do you find burdensome and unholy in your life?**

## PRAY

Recall sprouts and shoots of growth you see in yourself, in people around you, in your parish, your place of work, in our world.

**LEADER:** Jesus, you are the seed that has fallen into our earth and lived.

**ALL:** In you we see God's irrepressible life.

**LEADER:** Let us name a sign of growth that we see around us for which we are grateful.

*Take time to name signs of growth.*

**LEADER:** (Gives out seeds and plants to those gathered.)

You call us to plant our gifts in one another's lives with the hope of furious blooming.

**ALL:** May our love give life. Amen.



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