

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible in your midst, surround it with summer flowers, and light a candle beside it. Have one member of your group read the acclamations below, to which all respond loudly and clearly: Amen!

LEADER: Jesus shows us God is with us.

ALL: Amen!

LEADER: The Spirit came upon those in the upper room to loosen their tongues so they could tell the good news of Jesus.

ALL: Amen!

LEADER: We are here today to hear the word, take it into our hearts, and act as Jesus did in our world.

ALL: Amen!

LEADER: Then let us begin.

ALL: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Living things flourish in the solstice sun of northern hemisphere summer. Blooming flax and canola quilt the Canadian prairie in blue and yellow patchwork. Interstate highways bloom with white daisies. Knee-high corn runs up, down, and around rolling Iowa hills and across Illinois prairie.

Wild roses grow pink and sweet-smelling along rural roadsides. Apples and other

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY



fruit swell hidden in leafy trees, tomatoes on their vines, cabbage within their leaves. Wheat and oats have already turned golden in southern and southwestern fields. Summer is the season of lushness, the prime of the earth when all that will feed us grows.

Families bike, hike, and swim. People of all ages loosen and strengthen their joints with walks or jogs in the sun or strolls in the evening. Depression lifts with more exercise and sunlight.

The summer Sundays in Ordinary Time have a post-resurrection perspective. They are the Sundays in Growing Time. The Church has celebrated Jesus'

death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit. In Jesus' physical absence but risen presence, how shall Spirit-filled Christians live into the future?

The Sunday gospels of summer and fall nourish the growing, blooming, and ripening of Christian life. The gospel urges us to shout out our faith to others and to recognize God will treat us the way we treat others. The way we live our Christian lives is the most fundamental way we hand on our faith.

● **What ways to reach out to others does summer open for you, especially to those most affected in the pandemic?**

GOSPEL

Jesus instructs his disciples not to fear.

NARRATOR: Jesus sent his disciples out with the following instruction.

JESUS 1: Have no fear of people. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.

JESUS 2: Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

JESUS 3: Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

JESUS 4: Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Matthew 10.26-33

Jesus sends us out to acknowledge him.

During the Cycle A Sundays in Ordinary Time, the Church reads semi-continuously from Matthew's gospel. Matthew organizes his gospel as a manual for the growth and life of the community for whom he writes in the A.D. 80s.

Matthew follows the broad plot of Mark's gospel, the first gospel to be written. Jesus' baptism is the beginning of his public ministry; his death and resurrection, the end. Within this plot, Matthew organizes Jesus' words and deeds into distinctive sections as one might catalog a library.

Matthew groups many of Jesus' sayings in chapters 5-7 in the setting of a Sermon on the Mount. Here the reader finds the beatitudes, the golden rule, the imperatives to turn the other cheek and love our enemies.

In chapters 8-9 Matthew groups miracle stories. Jesus heals the sick and frees people from demons. Following these stories of Jesus' deeds, Matthew organizes a section for those whom Jesus commissions to take up his work; this is chapter 10, the missionary discourse.

In chapter 10, Jesus commissions 12 disciples to do what he had been doing—healing and freeing people, bringing the kingdom of God into people's lives. In Matthew 10.5-42, Jesus instructs these missionaries to expect their lives to be no different from his. These instructions come to us as sayings. Many of these sayings anticipate that missionaries and disciples will experience the same conflict and persecution Jesus did.

Photo Clare Pelkey, CSJ



- When did you begin to take your mission to live and teach as Jesus did seriously?
- Who was your inspiration?

Jesus' missionary sayings assume his disciples may suffer rejection as he did, but they counter this cost of discipleship with three reasons for courage. **First**, Jesus' teachings are not the esoteric secrets of an elite inner circle. Jesus publicly teaches ordinary men and women in his ministry and calls disciples, who are ordinary people, to do the same.

Second, missionaries should fear physical death less than despair and death of the spirit. This latter possibility exists for those who do not respond to the Spirit's promptings in their deepest selves. Death of the spirit, the worst end of Christian life, is within every disciple's power to prevent.

Third, Jesus urges us to affirm that God cares for even the most common and seemingly expendable of birds, the sparrow. By getting the hearer to affirm the worth of sparrows, the saying sets us up to recognize how much more valuable is every ordinary, human person.

- What deadens your spirit?
- What is the importance of ordinary people as Christian disciples today?
- How can living the golden rule help stabilize our volatile world today?

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY **JUSTICE**

- Download the seven principles of Catholic social teaching at goodgroundpress.com. Try to live one of the principles in a special way this week. Be ready to share with your group how the principle helped you respond to people you met and situations you encountered.

The final saying in Sunday's gospel sums up the rest. It turns on the principle of reciprocity. Jesus will acknowledge us before God as we acknowledge Jesus before others. This saying challenges us to be public witnesses of Jesus' healing and freeing love in our lives.

The early Christians lived in the shadow of the Roman Empire, which considered their faith illegal. Today Christians live in a capitalist economy gone global that considers religion irrelevant. The revenue of many multi-national corporations rivals the gross national product of nation states. However, corporations have no

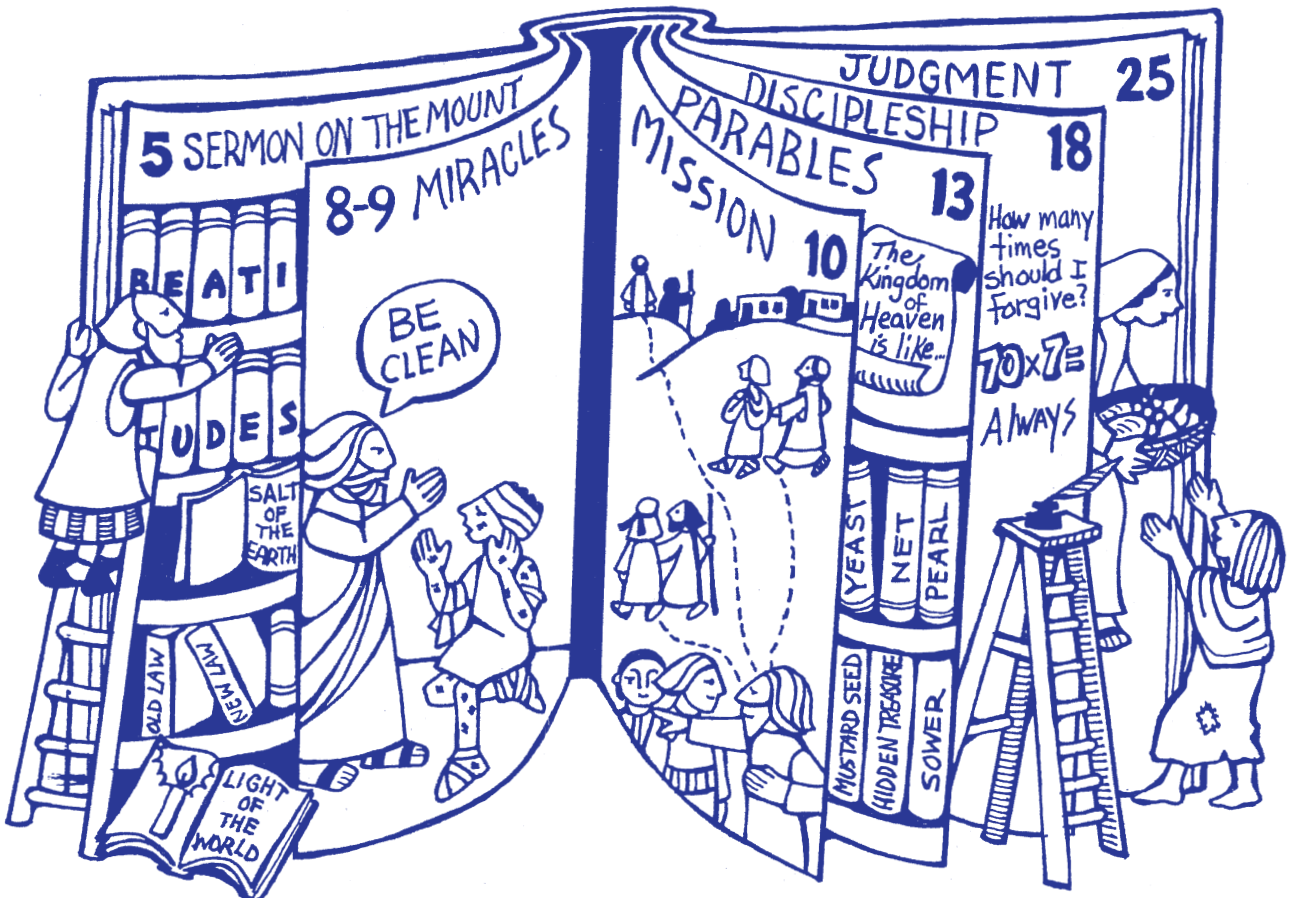
obligation to uphold Christian values or human rights as nations do, only to profit stockholders.

When companies downsize or move to secure cheaper workers, some CEOs see leaving people out of work, without insurance, and unable to pay mortgages as "just business." They take huge salaries and bonuses for their work. They see no incongruity between how they treat employees and how they treat themselves. Other CEOs and managers help workers make transitions when businesses shrink.

Catholic social teaching challenges us to live our Christian

values in our public and corporate lives. People are not commodities; they have dignity and rights, including the right to a just and livable wage. Work takes its dignity from the human beings who do it.

- What gospel principles do you practice in your public life? In your business life?
- In what practical ways do you seek to put Catholic social teaching to work in public policies?
- What groups do you work with to build up our civic community? If none, what groups might interest you?



Jeremiah speaks for God to kings and people.

Israel's prophets speak publicly for God before king and people, but none so disturbingly as Jeremiah. His words interpret the signs of his time, the decades before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. His vocation as God's prophet involves him in the suffering and defeat of his people.

Ancient superpowers crisscross Israel in a three-cornered struggle for power in these decades. Assyria, the nation that defeated the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., weakens and falls to the Babylonians in 612. Egypt marches north to take back land.

Israel's King Josiah, the great religious reformer who ruled in Jeremiah's youth, tries to stop Egypt but is killed at Megiddo in Galilee in 609. Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, becomes an Egyptian vassal state until the Babylonians defeat Egypt in 605 and make Judah a Babylonian vassal.

Jeremiah speaks warnings to Israel's king and people, calling them to repent and seek God's help. After King Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's writing, the prophet sees no hope for his people. He speaks words of God's inevitable judgment.

In fact, Jeremiah sees Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian

leader, as the instrument of God. This is a traitorous view for which Jeremiah is left to die in a cistern. An Ethiopian helps him out.

Jeremiah continues his thankless prophetic mission in the reign of Judah's last king, Zedekiah. At one point Jeremiah wears a yoke to dramatize the word of judgment God has him speak. "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon," he tells the king. "Why should your people die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence as God has spoken concerning any nation that will not serve the King of Babylon" (27.12-13).

King Zedekiah listens to the prophet Hananiah, who tells him what he wants to hear. Hananiah promises Zedekiah in God's name, "I have broken the yoke of the King of Babylon."

Jeremiah can only walk away when he hears Hananiah. God gives him no other words than those which urge the king to surrender to Babylon.

Later Jeremiah does receive a word from God about Hananiah and denounces this prophet, telling him he will be dead in a year. Sunday's reading probably comes from the time of Hananiah's death, which shows Jeremiah speaks truth.

Jeremiah's lament

I hear many whispering, "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him."

But God is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.

O God of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Sing to God; praise God who has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

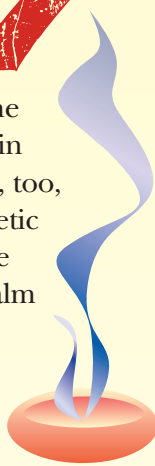
Jeremiah 20.10-13

- Who among us in our public life do you regard as a true prophet? As a true leader?
- Act as a public prophet this week by writing a letter to the editor on a local or national issue or by speaking out at a public meeting.

PRAY

Pray together concerning the issues and people you hold in your heart. Name and pray, too, that people hear the prophetic words you will speak or write this week. Use Sunday's psalm verse as a response to each petition:

Keep us always in your love.



A help when mourning the loss of a loved one. Go to goodgroundpress.com to read a sample chapter.

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