

July 19, 2020

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 13:24-43

Jesus proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' His slaves said to him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

He proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'"

He spoke to them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world."

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

### **Background:**

The gospel text for this Sunday follows directly after the text from last Sunday's gospel. Last week, the first line described Jesus leaving the house and going down by the sea. After Jesus addressed the crowd that had gathered, he dismissed them and returned to the house (Matthew 13:36). Like the parable of last week, the first two parables of the text for today are about the sowing of seeds. This text concludes with the same admonition which concluded the parable of last week: "Whoever has ears ought to hear." (Matthew 13:9 and 43b.) The repetition of the line indicates its importance. While there are a number of common elements in the parable from last week and those in the text for this week, what stands out is that the last parable is about a woman doing one of the most ordinary kitchen tasks, making bread. In the male-dominated culture in which Jesus lived, Jesus' effort to include an example that every woman of the day would understand speaks its own message of the Kingdom. Even though the parable itself is short, the fact that its focus is a woman doing an ordinary task of her day would have been noticed by the gender-segregated society of Jesus' day.

Another cultural aspect is important to appreciating these parables. It is the importance of maintaining one's status within the community, and the enjoyment that naturally arises when one can make another look foolish. The modern reader may get some insight into what significance such activity played in daily life by reflecting on how often others tried to set Jesus up with a situation where they hoped he would look foolish in the eyes of the crowd who had come to hear him preach.

In the first parable of today's text, an enemy has come in the night to sow weeds in the midst of his neighbor's wheat field (Matthew 13:25). This enemy may be thought of more as a neighboring farmer who will enjoy

making his fellow farmer look a bit foolish. He will get the attention when others learn how he has made his neighbor look ridiculous when the weeds begin to grow with the wheat. The possibility that an enemy might try to embarrass a fellow farmer by deliberately sowing weeds in another's field was not just hypothetical. Further, the farmer who did not try to rectify or retaliate in some fashion would appear even more foolish in the eyes of his neighbors, because he would be thought of as weak and not able to defend his property or his reputation. But as the parable unfolds, he turns out to be the wiser of the two. He was wise enough to know that the weeds would be unable to choke off his wheat, and the two would be able to grow together. At the time for the harvest, he has both his wheat harvest and some fuel for his fire. For the Christians who will hear this parable through the Gospel, the parable also points to Jesus himself, who, in his passion, is strong enough to endure the wickedness of others without needing to lash out in defense--yet in the end he enjoys the final vindication.

The parables that Jesus tells in this text reveal a God who is imperceptibly at work in ordinary human ways, a God who at the same time is more powerful than any outside effort to thwart God's intentions. This God's kingdom is unfolding in the lives of farmers, women, and even Gentiles. (A common symbol for Gentiles was birds that came to nest in the branches of the mustard bush.)

This Sunday, a short form of the gospel text can be used, which would only include the first parable (Matt 13:24-30). This option would strengthen a connection to the first reading (Wisdom 12:13, 16-19), but would eliminate the repetition of the line, "Whoever has ears ought to hear," and it would pass over the reality that Jesus made a significant effort to include women in the way he taught and pointed toward the kingdom, even in his very male-dominated world.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Do you know people who enjoy playing practical jokes on others?
2. Have you ever been the focus of someone else's "practical joke?"
3. What do you think the ordinary peasants of the day were thinking as they heard Jesus tell these parables?
4. Who, in our society, might be symbolized by "weeds growing in the midst of the wheat?"
5. Within you as a person, what values or behaviors might be weeds that are growing among the wheat?
6. Who today speaks with the wisdom of the farmer who is willing to let the weeds grow with the wheat?
7. What aspects of your life make you look or feel foolish? How might God be using those things to teach you something you need to understand?
8. Do you ever feel that the kingdom of God is unfolding too slowly?
9. Why would Jesus tell parables about the kingdom of God that focused on the experience of the most common of people, including women?
10. Which of the parables in the gospel text speaks most strongly to you?
11. What do you hear most strongly in this gospel? Can you take time to talk with God about what it is you are hearing in this gospel text?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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### **Excerpts from the Readings for July 19, 2020, the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

There is no god besides you who have the care of all, you have not unjustly condemned.  
Your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.  
You show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved.  
Though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern.  
You taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind;  
and you gave your children hope that you would permit repentance for their sins.

You, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in kindness to all who call upon you.  
Hearken, O Lord, to my prayer and attend to the sound of my pleading.  
All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O Lord, and glorify your name.  
For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds; you alone are God.  
You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity.  
Turn toward me, and have pity on me; give your strength to your servant.

Brothers and sisters: The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness;  
for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes.  
And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit,  
because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

Jesus proposed a parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.  
While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off.  
When the crop grew, the weeds appeared. His slaves said, 'Do you want us to pull them up?'  
He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them.  
Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters,  
"First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

He proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.  
It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.  
It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'"  
He spoke to them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast  
that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened."  
All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:  
I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.  
His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."  
He said, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children  
of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.  
The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.  
Just as weeds are collected and burned, so will it be at the end of the age.  
The Son of Man will send angels, and they will collect all who cause others to sin and all evildoers.  
They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.  
Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

**Excerpts from Wisdom 12:13-19; Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16; Romans 8:26-27; and Matthew 13:24-43**