

ctkAlive! Scripture Study

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



Mustard Plant

photo by [Vincent Keiman](#) (2020)

Source: [freepik.com](#)

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, we have added links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Leave the reflection and chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Exception: In the course of the lesson, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

By [Nancy C. Townley](#)
(adapted for use here)

God of small seeds and mighty plants
you take our meager lives
and with your love cause them to produce
acts of love of loving kindness for you in this world.
You hear out cries and find us when we are lost
and wandering in fear.
You bring us home with you so we may be made whole
rejoicing in your goodness.
Help us to joyfully serve you all or days,
knowing that you are always watching over us.
Prepare our hearts to receive your word
and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen

Source: [The Center for Mennonite Studies](#)

Introduction to the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Scriptures

Matthew 13: 24-43 “The kingdom of heaven is like . . . a man who sowed good seed in his field . . . like a mustard seed . . .”

“Seeds” dominate the imagery of this week’s liturgy. The table mustard condiment we put on our hot dogs comes from mustard seeds, not the plant’s bright yellow flowers. Vincent Keiman’s photograph (above) provides a graphic image. How many of us have ever seen a mustard plant/tree “in the wild”? When he told this parable, Jesus clearly had an image in mind from his own personal experience.

Note: Let's not get caught up in Jesus' description of the mustard seed as growing bigger than all the plants and trees. Despite its diminutive size, one tiny mustard seed can produce a plant that grows 5 to 6½ feet tall, towering over other plants in a garden. It lasts only one season. Varieties of white and brown mustard seeds produce a tall mustard tree, but nothing to match our own California redwood trees.

Wisdom (of Solomon) 12: 13, 16-19 “You have taught your people that righteous persons must love their human fellows.”

The *Book of Wisdom* was written about fifty years before the coming of Christ. Its unknown author belonged to the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt. He wrote in Greek but in a style patterned on that of Hebrew verse.

How did it happen that there existed a flourishing Jewish community in Egypt by the first century? In the 5th century BCE/BC, Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar left a large number of Jews behind, because of their perceived lesser value to him as a work force. Sadly, Jeremiah, the great prophet, seemed so disregarded by his fellow Israelites that the invaders left him behind, as well. Some of those “left behind” Jews, including the Jeremiah, emigrated to Egypt, where they could live in relative peace. That’s how scattered Jewish (*diaspora*, or ‘foreign’) communities came to be there in the first century B.C. Does this also give us a clue as to why Mary and Joseph, just decades later, fled there with their infant son?

Psalm 86: 5-6, 9-10, 15-16 “Lord, you are good and forgiving.” Good thing for us!

Romans 8: 26-27 “The Spirit helps us in our weakness.” We don’t like to admit our limitations, so we put futile effort into achieving perfection *by ourselves*, without the Holy Spirit’s help.

First Reading from the Book of Wisdom (of Solomon) (12: 13, 16-19)

“There is no other god besides you, one who cares for everyone; there is no need to justify your judgments. Your strength is the source of your justice and because you

are the Lord of all, you can be merciful to everyone. To those who doubt your sovereign power you show your strength, and you confound the insolence of those who ignore it. But you, the Lord of strength, judge with prudence and govern us with great patience, because you are able to do anything at the time you want. In this way you have taught your people that righteous persons must love their human fellows; you have also given your people cause for hope by prompting them to repent of their sin."

Personal Reflection

Perhaps you have heard the saying, "I love humanity . . . It's *people* I can't stand!" In answer, Wisdom says, "You have taught your people that righteous persons must love their human fellows." Jesus echoed this command: "Love your neighbors as yourselves" (Matthew 5: 43-48). That *includes our perceived enemies*.

— *How discouraged am I about the current state of humanity, including my own neighbors and political leaders? How hard is it for me to love people whom I thoroughly disagree with and dislike, and whose values are opposite to mine? What "wisdom" about this question do I find in this week's verses of Book of Wisdom?*

Antiphon: Psalm 86: (5-6, 9-10, 15-16)

Loyalty in God's service

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You are good and forgiving, O Yahweh,
caring for those who call on you.
Listen, O Yahweh, to my prayer,
hear the voice of my pleading.

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

All the nations you have made will come;
they will worship before you, O Yahweh,
and bring glory to your name.
For you are great, and wonderful are your deeds;
you alone, are God.

Lord, you are good and forgiving

But you, O Yahweh God, are merciful,
slow to anger, loving and faithful.
Turn to me, take pity on me;

give your strength to your servant,
and save the child of your handmaid.

Lord, you are good and forgiving

Personal Reflection

“You are good and forgiving, O Yahweh, caring for those who call on you.” Notice the qualification in the second half of the sentence. In the Jewish mind of the time and fostered by their racial / social / religious identity as “God’s Chosen People.” They reserved their love for “their own kind.”

— *How did Jesus expand the embrace of love beyond that of his inherited Jewish identity and faith?*

“Turn to me, take pity on me; give your strength to your servant, and save the child of your handmaid.”

— *What special meaning do the psalmist’s words have for me during this life-altering period of human existence?*

Second Reading: From St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans (8: 18-23)

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us, without words, as if with groans. And he, who sees inner secrets, knows the desires of the Spirit, for he asks for the holy ones, what is pleasing to God.”

Personal Reflection

“We do not know how to pray as we ought.” Paul has come a long way since the cry of ‘Saul of Tarsus’s’ firebrand days: “Kill every follower of The Way!” He shares with the Roman Community what he himself has learned about prayer. Of himself, he cannot pray, nor can he draw faithful Jews and foreigners steeped in paganism to embrace his faith and love for the Risen Christ. Keep in mind that he is asking them to risk giving up life itself in martyrdom.

— *If I want others, including my own family, to follow my example in prayer and faith, what can I learn from Paul’s public humility and surrender of self?*

— *What message does my own prayer practice (or weakness) send to those I hope to influence on their spiritual journeys?*

Proclamation from the Gospel Matthew (13: 24-43)

Parable of the farmer and his enemy

“Jesus told the people another parable, ‘The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep, his enemy came, and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the plants sprouted and produced grain, the weeds also appeared. Then, the servants of the owner came, and said to him, ‘Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’

“He answered them, ‘This is the work of an enemy.’

“They asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’

“He told them, ‘No, when you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat with them. Let them grow together, until harvest; and, at harvest time, I will say to the workers: Pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them; then gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Parable of the mustard seed and the yeast (see also Mk 4:30; Lk 13:18)

“Jesus offered them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is smaller than all other seeds, but once it is fully grown, it is bigger than any garden plant; like a tree, the birds come and rest in its branches.’

“He told them another parable, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast that a woman took, and hid in three measures of flour, until the whole mass of dough began to rise.’

“Jesus taught all these things to the crowds by means of parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. This fulfilled what was spoken by the Prophet: ‘I will speak in parables. I will proclaim things kept secret since the beginning of the world.’

“Then he sent the crowds away and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.’

“Jesus answered them, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed are the people of the kingdom; the weeds are those who follow the evil one. The enemy who sows the weeds is the devil; the harvest is the end of time, and the workers are the angels. Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom all that is scandalous and all who do evil. And these will be thrown into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Personal Reflection

“Jesus taught all these things to the crowds by means of parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.” Because even his closest disciples

seemed frustrated with all the indirect parables, so he would take them aside and “explain” the simile’s meaning (as we find in this week’s gospel).

- *Why did Jesus rely so heavily on parables as his primary way of teaching about the “kingdom of heaven”? Was he talking down to his less-educated listeners, or did he have another reason? If he had another reason, what might it have been?*
- *When have I wished that the Risen Lord would give me a clearer roadmap by which to live my life? Upon graduation from high school, would I have liked seeing my whole adult life mapped out step by step until death? What are the pros and cons?*

Shelter-in-Place

We are all discouraged by the expanding growth of the corona virus in California and many other states. None of us foresaw an extended need to shelter and take extraordinary precautions.

- *How is this crisis affecting me personally? My family? What have been the advantages and disadvantages of having all this family togetherness time? (List them on a sheet of paper.)*
- *What is my interior mood this week about restrictions to my freedom to move about, congregate and socialize? What do I miss most about my life as it “used to be” (in the good not-so-old pre-virus days)?*
- *To what extent has the current crisis negatively impacted my finances? If it has, how am I dealing with that loss? What are my prospects for the future?*

Write about your feelings and your lived experience during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

Take some time to write about the insights you’ve gained from reflecting on the parable-heavy readings for the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time and the current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompts:

- *What is the first thought that comes to mind?*

We mustn’t simply be grateful “recipients” of God’s good gifts. We need to be “givers,” too.

- *What difference will this week’s Scriptures and current societal events make in how I think, live, love—and “give back”—during the week ahead?*

Jesus invites me to “give a cup of cold water” to someone who needs it.

— *Is there someone who has been on my mind lately who would appreciate a phone call or an e-mail/text message from me? Can I resolve to make that contact this week?*

Questions

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

Preview of Next Session

Readings for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Kings 3: 5, 7-12 “Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, ‘Ask what you want me to give you.’”

Psalm 119: 57, 72, 76-77, 127-30 “Lord, I love your commands.”

Romans 8: 28-30 “We know that in everything, God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called according to his plan.”

Matthew 13: 44-52 “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.”

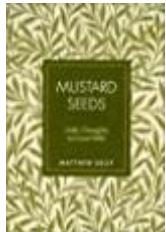
For Inspirational Reading / Listening

Song:

[“The Mustard Seed”](#)

—Words and music by John Hayles,
sung by Nina Corlett-McDonald

Book:



[Mustard Seeds](#), by [Matthew Kelly](#) (a book daily reflections)

Kelly is the founder of the [Dynamic Catholic Institute](#). He has dedicated his life to helping people and organizations become the-best-version-of-themselves.
(I have not read this book—AJG)

Closing Prayer

A prayer for when we are overwhelmed

Source: www.prayerforanxiety.com

(adapted for use here)

O merciful Lord,
so many tasks and worries
everything pulls at me
pushing me past my limits.
How much can I take?

Call me back to you, Lord,
bring me out of the wilderness
away from the chaos.
Even during a storm, you slept
as you knew your Father loved you.

So, even now as I feel
completely overwhelmed
may your Word guide me.
May your Holy Spirit give me
clarity and strength.

You see me as I am, Lord.
I wait and rest in you.
This moment too shall pass
but your love is eternal
your kingdom everlasting.

May I rest with you
in the loving arms of our Father
in your kingdom.
I pray in your holy name,
Amen.

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](http://www.ccbo.org/bible/)

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Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

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(follow the link above to the novel *Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words*)