



Jesus' Parables— What Does Jesus Teach?

Meditations, Midrash, and Scripture Discussion

10 Lessons, B#1-10

Series 2: God, the Son, Redeeming Power

Study: The Trinity: Loving God and Loving Our Neighbors

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Rev. 2016

Loving God and Loving our Neighbors

Jesus said, the first commandment is
“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”
And the second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
There is no other commandment greater than these.
Mark 12:30-31

**God calls our whole selves
—heart, soul, mind, and strength—
to love.**

Turn aside—See—Question—Listen

Then Moses said,
“I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”
When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush.
Exodus 3:3-4a NRSV

**Take time to turn aside,
be curious to see and willing to ask questions,
then listen for God’s insight and direction.**

Ten Lessons in Three Parts

- **Meditation to focus the mind and heart on the lesson**
- **Midrash, text study, to examine specific parts of the theme in depth**
- **Scripture Discussion texts for background and free ranging discussion revolving around the theme (Focus on one or choose several related scripture texts to discuss or meditate on.)**

Jesus’ Parables—What Does Jesus Teach?

Contents

Meditation: Jesus' Parable of the Vine and the Branches shows how we are connected to God. [B#1]	5
Midrash: Connected to God	6-7
Scripture Discussion: We are connected to God and to each other.	8-9
Meditation: Jesus' parables about light, salt, and leaven show us what it means to be God's people. [B#2]	10
Midrash: A Little Can Influence a Lot—What are God's people like?	11-12
Scripture Discussion: Parables use word pictures to show a point: light of the world, salt of the earth, leaven in bread.	13-15
Meditation: Jesus' Parable of the Sower shows God's word in people's lives. [B#3]	16
Midrash: What Happens to Seeds?	17-18
Scripture Discussion: The Parable of the Sower shows what could happen to God's word in people's lives.	19-23
Meditation: Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed shows growth. [B#4]	24
Midrash: Growing Individually and Together: Each Believer's Faith and God's Family Grow	25-26
Scripture Discussion: Faith is a gift of God that grows (like a seed) and produces the good works (fruit) that God has prepared for us to do individually and together.	27-30
Meditation: Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan shows loving our neighbor as ourselves and treating others as we would like to be treated. [B#5]	31
Midrash: Who is my Neighbor? The Good Samaritan	32-33
Scripture Discussion: Loving our neighbor as ourselves and treating others as we would like to be treated is Jesus' point.	34-36
Meditation: Jesus' command to Ask-Search-Knock tells God's people what to do. [B#6]	37
Midrash: Do Something! Ask—Search—Knock	38-39
Scripture Discussion: God wants us to be active in talking and listening to him: asking, searching, and knocking.	40-41
Meditation: Jesus' Parable of Building a House on Rock shows the result of hearing and doing God's word. [B#7]	42
Midrash: Laying a Foundation and Building a House	43-44
Science Experiment	45
Scripture Discussion: Hearing and doing Jesus' word is like building our lives on the rock.	46-47
Meditation: Jesus' parables often show that God loves and searches for those who are lost. [B#8]	48

Midrash: God Seeks Us Out and Saves Us	49
Script: Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son and Zacchaeus, the tax collector	50-51
Scripture Discussion: God loves and searches for those who are lost: the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the Prodigal Son.	52-53
Meditation: Jesus' word picture of Fishing for People shows us that God wants us to invite others. [B#9]	54
Midrash: Fishing for People + Script: Luke 5:1-11	55-56
Scripture Discussion: Jesus' Parable of Fishing for People shows us what God wants us to do.	57-60
Meditation: Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet shows God's invitation coming to everyone. [B#10]	61
Midrash: Who is Invited?	62-63
Scripture Discussion: Jesus' Parables show God's invitation coming to everyone.	64-66
Closing Meditation	67

Studies by Phyllis Ballata

The Trinity: Loving God and Loving our Neighbors

Series 1: God the Father, Creative Power

Word Pictures of God the Father (A#1-10)

God Cares for Us (A#11-20)

God Gives Us Stewardship and Responsibility (A#21-30)

Series 2: God the Son, Redeeming Power

Jesus' Parables—What Does Jesus Teach? (B#1-10)

Jesus' Life—Who Do You Say that I Am? (B#11-20)

Jesus' Example—What Would Jesus Think and Do? (B#21-30)

Series 3: God the Holy Spirit, Transforming Power

Signs of the Spirit: Fruit (C#1-10)

The Spirit and the Church (C#11-20)

The Spirit in the Believer (C#21-30)

Preschool/Elementary School Educational Curriculum to parallel each study

Levels: Preschool, K-1-2, 3-4-5

The Time Has Come . . . to Talk of Many Things: Literature, History, Science, and Faith

Living As Though There Is a Tomorrow, Creating the Future by Choice Using Reason, Duty, Love, and Belief: A Moral Handbook

Writing from Life: Collecting and Connecting

Meditation B#1

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' Parable of the Vine and the Branches shows how we are connected to God.

[Jesus said,] “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:4-5 NRSV

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12 NRSV

Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. 1 Peter 2:5a NRSV

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7 NRSV

Lord, remind us that life means being connected—to you and through you to each other. Remind us that we each have a part to play and that the plant needs the roots and stem to feed the branches and twigs and leaves and flowers to create fruit. Thank you that we can grow where we are planted; that we can support our part of the wall; that we can be a part of the body that breathes or sees or digests or walks or thinks or lifts. Thank you that we can bear fruit because we are grounded in you. Amen.

Midrash: Connected to God [B#1]

[John 15:1-5; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 2:4-5a; 1 Corinthians 12:12]

When Jesus tells a story or parable using a word picture (or metaphor) to show us a lesson that he wants to teach, each of the parts of the picture have meaning. Jesus uses several word pictures to show how we are connected to God and connected to each other.

The grape vine and its branches

[Jesus said,] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed [pruned] by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:1-5 NRSV
Copy _____

Jesus describes God the Father as the Vinegrower. **What do you think a Vinegrower does?**

What does “pruning” mean? Why are branches pruned?

Jesus calls himself the Vine. The vine provides the roots and the central stem. **What do the roots do?**

Jesus’ calls his followers the Branches. **What does a healthy branch do?**

In the word picture, we bear “fruit” because we are branches on the vine. **For Jesus’ followers, what could “fruit” mean?**

“Fruit” is used in the Bible many times to show the results of being connected to God. For example, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity [goodness], faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23 NRSV

In this case, what “fruit” grows in our lives and shows that the Spirit is at work in us?

Other word pictures that show our connection to God and to each other show Jesus’ followers as parts of the body or stones in the building.

Living Stones

Peter calls Jesus the “cornerstone” and the Jesus’ followers “living stones” to be built into the spiritual house together: “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.”

1 Peter 2:4-5a NRSV

All the stones of a building are arranged based on the cornerstone. Christ is the cornerstone of the church, the first stone laid and the basis for the whole building.

What is the difference between a pile of rocks and a house built of stones? How does this word picture show we are all connected together in the church?

An Organ in the Body

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12 Copy _____

In Paul’s letters to the Christians at Corinth, he wants them to know that each part of the body makes a valuable contribution to the good of the whole. He also wants them to remember that when a part is separated from the body it cannot survive. The body of Christ or the Church exists by the mutual cooperation of all of its different members, who each have different parts to play.

Make up and tell a story to show how a member of the body is needed to do its part in the body, but it cannot live all alone, separated from the body. [The eye? The hand? The stomach?]

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#1]
Theme: Jesus' Parable of the Vine and the Branches
shows how we are connected to God.

Focus: We are connected to God and to each other.

Questions: How am I connected to God and his people? Metaphors: a branch on the vine, a brick in the building, an organ in the body

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:4-5 NRSV
- Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. 1 Peter 2:5a NRSV
- As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

Parable of the Vine and the Branches

Jesus the True Vine

[Jesus said,] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed [pruned] by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. John 15: 1-11 NRSV

One Body with Many Members

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member, but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any

less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 NRSV

[Note: then follows "a still more excellent way" in 1 Corinthians 13. "Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:13]

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity [goodness], faithfulness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:22-26 NRSV

Rooted in Christ

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7 NRSV

The Living Stone

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5 NRSV

Meditation B#2

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' parables about yeast, salt, and light show us what it means to be God's people.

[Jesus said,] “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” Matthew 13:33 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:13-16 NRSV

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. Ephesians 5: 8-9 NRSV

Lord, remind us that a little can influence a lot. A little yeast—alive and growing—makes the whole loaf rise. A little salt brings out the flavor. A little light can be seen from far away. Help us to act in our small ways—a little yeast, a little salt, a little light—for the sake of the whole. Amen.

Midrash: A Little Can Influence a Lot—What are God’s people like? [B#2]

[Matthew 5:13; Matthew 5:14-16; John 8:12; Ephesians 5:8b-9; Matthew 13:33]

Jesus told many parables—stories with word pictures to show a point or a teaching.

Some of the parables tell us what God’s people are supposed to be like in the world around them.

Salt

[Jesus said,] “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

Matthew 5:13 NRSV **Copy** _____

Salt is very useful: salt brings out the flavor in food, it keeps food from spoiling when there is no refrigeration, it is a cleaner and a purifier, and the right amount of salt is an essential part of our diet and helps us stay healthy. Your tears and your blood taste salty, and without the proper amount of salt you would become very sick. Throughout history salt has been extremely valuable—it was used like money, and those who had access to a mineral salt deposit or a way to make sea salt had a treasure.

If a Christian in the world is like salt, what is Jesus’ parable showing his followers they should be like?

Light

[Jesus said,] “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16 NRSV **Copy**

Light is necessary for growth, health, and safety, as well as for working and moving around in the dark. People who want to see in the dark must have a light. Remember that in Jesus' time after dark, light came only from candles or oil lamps—there were no electric lights.

If a Christian in the world is like a candle or oil lamp on a lampstand in a dark room, what is Jesus' parable showing his followers they should be like?

In the darkness, even a very small light can be seen from far away.

If a Christian in the world is like a lighted city on a hill, shining in the darkness, what is Jesus' parable showing his followers that they should be like?

Jesus also used this word picture to describe himself: Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." John 8:12 NRSV

Remember what light is like? Why does Jesus say that he is "the light of the world"?

Darkness and light have been used as word pictures for thousands of years. In this word picture, darkness means what is wrong or bad or false or dangerous. We often say that we should "shine a light" on a problem. Christians have also used this same word picture: "Live as children of light—for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true." Ephesians 5: 8b-9 NRSV

Leaven

Yeast leavens bread—makes it rise or get larger and more fluffy. "Unleavened" bread is dense and heavy or else thin, like crackers or tortillas. A little yeast added to the flour, water, and salt makes a loaf of bread expand because the yeast or leaven is alive, and it creates air spaces from carbon dioxide inside the bread. Later it is baked.

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." Matthew 13:33 NRSV

How could Jesus' followers in the world be like leaven or yeast in a loaf of bread?

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#2]

Theme: Jesus' Parables show us what it means to be God's people.

Focus: Parables use word pictures to show a point: light of the world, salt of the earth, leaven in bread.

Questions: What is a parable? A parable is a story using word pictures or figures of speech [like similes, metaphors, personification, etc.] to show a point. Interpreting the parable depends on understanding the facts as well as the multiple ideas behind the word picture and then explaining the meaning of the comparison and applying it to your life.

A Christian in the world may be a little person, but how important is a little light, a little salt, or a little yeast to the larger whole?

- What are the characteristics of light? [what is it for, how does it work, why does it work?] How can God's people be like light? How is Jesus like light?
- What are the characteristics of salt? [what is it for, how does it work, why does it work?] How can God's people be like salt?
- What are the characteristics of yeast/leaven? [what is it for, how does it work, why does it work?] How can God's people be like yeast in bread?

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:13-16 NRSV
- For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. Ephesians 5: 8-9 NRSV
- Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." John 8:12 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

Salt

[Jesus said,] "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot." Matthew 5:13 NRSV

[Jesus said,] "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it [restore its saltiness]? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Mark 9: 50 NRSV

[Jesus said,] "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" Luke 14: 34-35 NRSV

Light

Your word is a lamp to my feet / and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16

He [Jesus] said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” Mark 4:21-25 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light. Then pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away.” Luke 8:16-18 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.” Luke 11:33-36 NRSV

[Jesus said to Nicodemus,] “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For those who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” John 3:16-21 NRSV

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” John 8:12 NRSV

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. Philippians 2:14-15 NRSV

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. Ephesians 5: 8-11 NRSV

Leaven

He[Jesus] told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” Matthew 13:33 NRSV

And again he [Jesus] said, “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” Luke 13:20-21 NRSV

Meditation B#3

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' Parable of the Sower shows God's word in people's lives.

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he [Jesus] said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" Luke 8:4-8 NRSV

[Jesus said privately to his disciples who had asked him to explain the Parable of the Sower,] "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance." Luke 8:11-15 NRSV

[Jesus said to his disciples who had asked him to explain a parable,] "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." Matthew 13:16-17 NRSV

[The Apostle Paul said to the believers at Corinth,] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NRSV

Lord, remind us that the Parable of the Sower is about the ground. The seeds are sowed everywhere and they could grow, but the soil and conditions are different. Keep our lives fertile and our hearts soft. Keep us from being the hard, beaten down path where the seeds cannot penetrate and are threatened by outside forces—or the rocky ground where no roots develop and where lack of living water causes us to wither in the heat of life—or the thorny ground full of conflicts and distractions. And remind us to do our part in planting and watering and weeding. Give us your power to grow. Amen.

Midrash: What Happens to Seeds? [Luke 8: 4-8,11-15] [B#3]

A parable is a story that is intended to tell a lesson. Each part of the story has a meaning that connects to the lesson. But not everyone who hears it will “get it.” Understanding the meaning of a parable or a word picture or a “metaphor” takes extra thought. Often Jesus needed to explain the lesson of a parable to the disciples because they did not understand the meaning.

In the **Parable of the Sower**, Jesus first tells just the story to the crowds of people (Luke 8:4-8), and then later he explains the parable to the disciples (Luke 8:11-15). Some parts of the story are easy to explain, and other parts are more complicated.

The Seed

[Jesus said,] “A sower went out to sow his seed. . . . Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.” Luke 8:5a, 11 **Copy** _____

The Path

[Jesus said,] “And as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. . . . The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Luke 8:5b, 12 **Copy**

Why is the word picture of a “path” important?

How could the seed/word disappear? What could “trampled on” and “ate it up” mean?

The Rocky Soil

[Jesus said,] “Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. . . . The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away.” Luke 8:6, 13 **Copy**

Why is the word picture of “rock” or rocky soil important?

Why would the seed/word wither even though the person heard it happily at first? What could the “root” mean?

The Thorns

[Jesus said,] “Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. . . . As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. “ Luke 8:7, 14 NRSV **Copy**

Why is the word picture of “thorns” important?

Why would the seed/word be choked out? What could “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life” mean? What could “fruit does not mature” mean?

The Good Earth

[Jesus said,] “Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold. . . . But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.” Luke 8:8a, 15 **Copy**

Why is the word picture of “good soil” important?

What can the seed/word do in good soil? What could “bear fruit” mean?

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#3]

Theme: The Parable of the Sower shows what could happen to God's word in people's lives.

Focus: The Parable of the Sower shows God's word coming to people's lives.

Questions: Who is the sower? What is the seed? What do the trampling feet and the birds represent? The rocky soil is a place to grow, so what is wrong that causes the plants to die? What do the thorns represent? What is good soil, and how can we tell that the plant is growing well?

Texts: Matthew 13:1-23 Parable of the Sower; Purpose of Parables; Parable of the Sower Explained
[or Mark 4: 1-20 or Luke 8:4-15]

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance." Luke 8:4-15 NRSV
- [Jesus said to his disciples who had asked him to explain a parable,] "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." Matthew 13:16-17 NRSV
- [The Apostle Paul said to the believers at Corinth,] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring forth before all the nations. Isaiah 61:11 NRSV

Often the same parable is repeated in different gospels. Notice the differences?

#1 And he [Jesus] told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil

and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone who has ears listen! .

...

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13: 3-9, 18-23 NRSV

#2 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that

‘they may indeed look, but not perceive,
and may indeed listen, but not understand;
so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’”

And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” Mark 4: 1-20 NRSV

#3 When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil,

and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables so that

‘looking they may not perceive,
and listening they may not understand.’

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.” Luke 8:4-15 NRSV

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the 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 causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!” Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 NRSV

Purpose of Parables (see #1 above)

Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

‘You will indeed listen, but never understand,

and you will indeed look, but never perceive.
For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." Matthew 13:10-17 NRSV

The Use of Parables

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet [Isaiah]:

"I will open my mouth to speak in parables;
I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world." Matthew 13:34-35

The Use of Parables

With many such parables he [Jesus] spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples. Mark 4:33 NRSV

He [Jesus] also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he does in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." Mark 4:26-29 NRSV

I [the Apostle Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NRSV

Biblical Commentary: *NRSV Student Bible, Zondervan*

Psalm 78:2: "Matthew saw this verse as foreshadowing Jesus' teaching style (Matthew 13:35). A 'parable' or 'proverb' (the Hebrew word is the same) simply compares one thing with another." (603)

Matthew 13:10: "An illiterate society (like much of Palestine in Jesus' day) passes down wisdom in the form of proverbs and stories. Everybody likes a story, and stories are easier to remember than concepts or logical outlines. Jesus spoke in terms that would hold the interest of a society of farmers and fishermen, and about 30 of his masterful parables—stories with a point—have survived in the Gospels." (1002)

“When teaching, Jesus often relied on a parable—a compact short story with a moral. Speaking in parables allowed him to continue training his disciples ‘privately,’ despite the throngs of onlookers (Luke 8:10). He could explain the meaning to the disciples later on when they were alone together. Parables also helped preserve his message: Years later, as people reflected on what Jesus taught, his parables came to mind in vivid detail.

“Luke, a master storyteller, collected 18 parables that appear nowhere else, and he also retold some of the most familiar. While Matthew emphasizes parables of the kingdom, Luke adds those that focus on people: the good Samaritan, a persistent widow, the lost son. His parables speak to heavy subjects, but in an unexpectedly disarming way.

“Jesus’ style of handling tough questions contrasts sharply with Paul’s. The apostle Paul wrapped concepts in theological words and gave formal explanations. In careful prose he patiently probed such complex words as *forgiveness* and *justification*.

“Jesus, speaking to a restless crowd of thousands, communicated the same message in three progressive stories—the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal and His Brother (Luke 15:1-32). Scottish Christians like to call that last story ‘The Wonderful Father.’ It expresses the heart of Jesus message about as well as any ten-volume theological work.” (1080)

Meditation B#4

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed shows growth.

He [Jesus] put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” Matthew 13:31-32 NRSV

[God's grace is a gift that allows us to bear fruit]: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:8-10 NRSV

[Faith that is alive bears fruit]: For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. James 2:26 NRSV

Lord, remind us again that your grace comes first—that we are not saved by our works. Help us to be patient in growing; help us to keep on keeping on. Send us gardeners to nurture the seedlings. With the Son and the Living Water and the healthy soil of a good heart and community, we can grow and become fruitful by your grace. Protect us through storm and drought, fertilize us with your Word, and give us courage to persevere, growing so that we may shelter others. Amen.

Midrash: Growing Individually and Together: Each Believer's Faith and God's Family both Grow [B#4]

[Ephesians 2:8-10; Matthew 17:19-21; Mark 9:29; Mark 4:30-32; I Corinthians 3:6-7]

Jesus uses the mustard seed to show two different ideas. Because the mustard seed is very small but grows into a tree, it can show how growth happens, beginning small and becoming big.

Thus, the kingdom of heaven can begin small and grow big, and the individual's faith can begin small and grow big.

The Believer's Faith Grows

The seed of faith is a gift of God's grace:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:8-10 NRSV

We are saved by God's grace, but as our faith grows, so does the fruit of faith.

What good work has God prepared for you to do today?

Jesus tells his disciples that faith is a powerful force.

In Matthew 17 the believer's faith is like a mustard seed.

[After Jesus healed a boy from epilepsy,] Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:19-21 NRSV

Yet in Mark after this same miracle, when the disciples ask why they could not heal the boy, Jesus says, "This kind can come out only through prayer." Mark 9:29 NRSV

The disciples will have to wait for Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to empower them.

Faith needs to grow.

Why start with something so small as a grain of mustard seed to represent faith?

What does an actual seed need in order to grow?

If we compare an actual seed to the seed of faith, what might be some things that the seed of faith needs in order to grow?

God’s Family Grows—“the kingdom of heaven”

In Matthew 13 the kingdom of heaven (God’s family) is like the mustard seed.

He [Jesus] also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Mark 4:30-32 NRSV [Matthew 13:31-32; Luke13:18-19]

Why do you think Jesus chose a mustard seed?

Why is it important that the birds come to the big bush to make nests?

How does this parable show growth of the family of God?

Sometimes there is controversy over where the power to give growth comes from.

The church of Corinth was splitting into the “followers of Paul” and the “followers of Apollos.” Paul wrote them a letter:

[Paul said,] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 **Copy**

Both Paul the Apostle and Missionary to the Gentiles and Apollos, a leader and teacher at Ephesus and Corinth, were important in “planting” and “watering” the seed of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Why is it important to say that “only God . . . gives the growth”?

As God’s gift of faith (seed) grows strong in each person and in the church, it can produce fruit (good works) when we find what God wants us to do.

Copy Ephesians 2:8-10 (from page 1) to remind yourself that the power and the grace come from God—with God’s power and grace, we can do the good works that God has ready for us to do.

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#4]

Theme: The Parable of the Mustard Seed shows growth.

Focus: Faith is a gift of God that grows (like a seed) and produces the good works (fruit) that God has prepared for us to do individually and together.

Background: The argument over faith vs. works is central to Christianity. Many religions require good works as a way earn God's favor. Christianity starts with faith as a free gift of God's grace—"not the result of works, so that no one may boast"—saying that works then follow and demonstrate faith. Doing works without faith has no direction or meaning, just as only saying the words of faith without the works of faith has no life.

Jesus uses the mustard seed to show two different ideas. Because the mustard seed is very small but grows into a tree, it can show how growth happens, beginning small and becoming big.

In Matthew 13 the kingdom of heaven (God's family) is like the mustard seed.

In Matthew 17 the believer's faith is like a mustard seed.

As God's gift of faith (seed) grows mature in the individual or the church, it can produce fruit (good works).

Questions: Faith needs to grow. Why start with something as small as a grain of mustard seed to represent faith? How does a seed grow into a tree? What does it need to grow?

Key scripture:

- He [Jesus] put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Matthew 13:31-32 NRSV
- [The gift of faith bears fruit:] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:8-10 NRSV
- [Faith needs to be alive to bear fruit:] For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. James 2:26 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

He [Jesus] put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Matthew 13:31-32 NRSV

He [Jesus] also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." Mark 4:30-32 NRSV

He [Jesus] said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.” Luke 13:18-19 NRSV

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” Luke 17:5-6 NRSV

Peter, James, and John have a “mountain-top” experience when Jesus is transfigured. They see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus, and they hear God’s voice saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5b).

But they must come down from the mountain and back to their everyday world. Immediately they are thrown into crowds of people making requests, arguing, and complaining. The disciples have to recognize their limitations and lack of faith. Jesus tells them that he will be betrayed and killed, but will rise again. With slight differences Matthew, Mark, and Luke all report this striking story of going from emotional and inspirational heights to the depths of distress and fear.

Jesus Cures a Boy with a Demon—Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection:

When they [Jesus, Peter, James, and John after the Transfiguration] came to a crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.” Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? Bring him here to me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.” And they were greatly distressed. Matthew 17:14-23 NRSV

When they [Jesus, Peter, James, and John after the Transfiguration] came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. He asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.” He answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.” And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if

you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Mark 9:14-32 NRSV

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain [after the Transfiguration], a great crowd met him. Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be here with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.” But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. Luke 9:37-45 NRSV

The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Romans 10:11-13 NRSV

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:23-28 NRSV

Note: For Christians, the continual “contest” between faith and works is important to think through. Christians should think of faith as a gift of God’s grace, a seed sown by God, which can be nurtured with good soil, sun, and water, and which grows up to bear fruit. Notice that Paul describes being saved by God’s grace through faith, and not because we have earned salvation by our goodness or our own efforts. But immediately he explains that we are created for good works which God has

prepared for us to do. James examines the problem from the angle of words vs. deeds, saying that deeds will be a natural result if a faith is alive and healthy.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:8-10 NRSV

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. James 2:14-19,26 NRSV

Note: There are other controversies in the church related to this. Sometimes there is controversy over where the power to grow comes from. The church of Corinth was splitting into the “followers of Paul” and the “followers of Apollos.”

Paul wrote them a letter: [Paul said,] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NRSV

“Power” has always been a significant problem for humans. Both Paul the Apostle, the great Missionary to the Gentiles, and Apollos, a leader and teacher at Ephesus and Corinth, were important in “planting” and “watering” the seed of the good news of Jesus Christ. And planting and watering are important for growth. But Paul makes clear that no amount of human work will create growth. The power belongs to God.

Meditation B#5

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

**Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan shows loving our neighbor as ourselves
and treating others as we would like to be treated.**

[Jesus said,] "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." Matthew 7:12 NRSV
[Golden Rule]

[The law says,] "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27 NRSV

Jesus replied [to the lawyer who asked, "And who is my neighbor?], "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He [the lawyer] said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10: 30-37 NRSV

Lord, help us to see the point of Jesus' story. The religious leaders passed by, but the foreign heretic stopped to help. The good men gave nothing, while the hated Samaritan risked himself, his time, and his money. Remind us to be a neighbor in whatever way we can. Remind us to show mercy to others—and to receive mercy with a grateful heart when we are in need. Give us both love and empathy. Amen.

Midrash: Who is my Neighbor? The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) [B#5]

Lawyer (who stood up to test Jesus): Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus: What is written in the law? What do you read there?

Lawyer: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus: You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.

Lawyer: And who is my neighbor?

Jesus: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robber?

Lawyer: The one who showed mercy.

Jesus: Go and do likewise.

The events and characters and conflicts in a good story have a reason for being in the story. Jesus' story (parable) of the Good Samaritan is a hard teaching—it is not simple or easy—the answers are not as obvious as we sometimes think.

What would be possible "good reasons" for anyone to pass the injured man by?

Believing the right thing or knowing what is the right choice is not the same as actually acting out of love to do the right thing.

Why would a Priest (a professional religious leader) pass by without helping?

Why would a Levite (a lay religious leader, an assistant in the Temple) pass by without helping?

Jesus chose the Samaritan, who was discriminated against and hated by the Jews, to be his example of a person who is a good neighbor. By doing this, Jesus also shows us that he does not want us to look down on others because they are different from us.

What did the Samaritan do? What were the problems? What was the cost?

How do you decide what to do that is both right and safe? Does it matter what age you are? Does it matter what skills you have?

What helpers do we have today that the people of Jesus' day did not have? How can we find help today that the people of Jesus' day could not do?

What is a "Good Samaritan Law"?

There are all kinds of love/help. What story or experience have you had that would show the answer to "Who is my neighbor?" How can you "show mercy" to others?

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#5]

Theme: The Parable of the Good Samaritan shows loving our neighbor as ourselves and treating others as we would like to be treated

Focus: Loving our neighbor as ourselves and treating others as we would like to be treated is Jesus' point.

Background:

The reason that Jesus tells this story is that a lawyer asks him a question in order to test him: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). When Jesus asks him, "What is written in the law?" (Luke 10:26), the lawyer says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Jesus says, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live" (Luke 10:28).

But the lawyer is now embarrassed that he has not asked a question that would really test Jesus, so he continues by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). At this point Jesus tells the story (parable) of the Good Samaritan in order to show right actions to a neighbor. Then Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:36), and the lawyer has to answer, "The one who showed him mercy" (Luke 10:37). Again Jesus says to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Questions: The natural question after realizing that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves is to ask, "And who is my neighbor?"

How do we decide "Who is my neighbor?"

Who are the people in the parable and how are they different?

How are their actions and probable thinking different? The priest and Levite may not want to be considered impure in case the man is dead and they touched him—but they do not know he is dead; they are in a hurry; they don't want to be involved; they are too important to stop. The Samaritan is a person Jews would have despised, but he is the one who acts out of mercy and is commended as the good example by Jesus.

What does the Samaritan actually do to help the stranger?

How is our "Good Samaritan Law" connected to this story?

The Golden Rule seems to be the one thing that everyone remembers learning even if they have forgotten almost every other ethical lesson: [Jesus said,] "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7:12

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." [Golden rule] Matthew 7:12 NRSV
- Jesus replied [to the lawyer who asked "And who is my neighbor?], "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an

inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10: 30-37 NRSV [writing]

- "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

[Jesus said,] "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." [Golden rule] Matthew 7:12 NRSV

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37 NRSV

[Note: Priest—highest religious leadership among the Jews; Levite—designated lay-associate of the priest; Samaritan—a despised, foreigner, looked down upon by the Jews]

The other obvious question is whether my neighbor is just the one I can actually see and interact with in person.

Do I have neighbors on the other side of town or the other side of the earth?

How do I affect their lives?

Do they matter to me?

Do I have neighbors in the future who will be affected by what I choose to do right now?

Can I apply the Golden Rule to people across space and time or only to those people I actually meet?

Is caring for our neighbors too hard?

Contemporary Christian Commentary: The facts in this meditation are connected to the Parable of the Good Samaritan:

“To have any lasting effect, our hearts must be moved by compassion.

We may find it dangerous.

We may have to use our own resources.

It may be inconvenient.

It may be expensive.

We may be ridiculed.

Everyone is our neighbor, including people across the globe and future generations.”

List by J. Matthew Sleeth, “Introduction: The Power of a Green God.” The Green Bible NRSV.

Meditation B#6

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' command to Ask-Search-Knock tells God's people what to do.

[Jesus said,] “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:7-11 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” John 16:24 NRSV

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all that we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21 NRSV

Lord, remind us to keep talking and listening to you—to keep asking, searching, and knocking. As we talk with you, we begin to see and understand what is good for us and for others. As we search for what you are providing, we begin to find your will. As we persist in knocking, we find the door that you are opening for us. Remind us to be active and persistent in faith and prayer. Amen.

Midrash: Do Something! Ask—Search—Knock [B#6]

[Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:5-13; James 1:5; Romans 8:26]

Jesus tells us to act—to do something! In this word picture he tells his followers that God wants to give them good things, but they need to communicate with God, look for what God is providing, and persist in prayer. In Luke 11 the disciples say, “Lord, teach us to pray,” and then right after Jesus teaches the disciples the Lord’s Prayer, he goes on to say that they should keep on praying and talking to God. They should act by asking, searching, and knocking.

In both Matthew and Luke the main message is the same:

[Jesus said,] “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Luke 11:9-10

Copy the words that are exactly the same in both these scripture verses: _____

Jesus uses examples that any person would recognize. In fact some of the examples are surprising!

No good parent would act this way:

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? Matthew 7:9-10 NRSV

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? Luke 11:11-12 NRSV

If a child asks for bread, would you give the child a _____?

If a child asks for a fish, would you give the child a _____?

If a child asks for an egg, would you give the child a _____?

What do you think a responsible parent would do?

No true friend would act this way:

And he [Jesus] said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. Luke 11: 5-8 NRSV

What does the friend do in the middle of the night?

What are two reasons you might get up and help your friend?

Then Jesus compares our normal human reactions to God’s response—knowing that God is perfectly loving:

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:11 NRSV

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Luke 11:13 NRSV

What does Jesus say, God will give?

Jesus does not say that God will give us anything we want just because we think we want it. Jesus says that God will give good things and will give the Holy Spirit, who will guide us.

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. James 1:5 NRSV

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Romans 8:26 NRSV

If we don’t know what to pray—what should we ask for?

Jesus says we should keep talking and listening to God—keep asking, searching, and knocking.

When we talk to God in prayer, we begin to see and understand what is good for us and for others.

When we search for what God is providing for us, we begin to find God’s will.

When we persist in knocking, we find the door that God is opening for us.

How can we apply this way of thinking in our everyday lives?

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#6]

Theme: Jesus' command to Ask-Search-Knock tells God's people what to do.

Focus: God wants us to be active in talking and listening to him: asking, searching, and knocking.

Question: What should I bring to God in prayer? Why would God want us to ask, search, and knock?

How does talking and listening to God change us?

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:7-11 NRSV
- [Jesus said,] “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” John 16:24 NRSV
- Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all that we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

[Jesus said,] “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:7-11 NRSV

And he [Jesus] said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Luke 11: 5-13 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” John 14:13-14 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and I am going to the Father.” John 16:23-28 NRSV

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Romans 8:26 NRSV

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all that we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21 NRSV

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. James 1:5-8 NRSV

Meditation B#7

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' Parable of Building a House on Rock shows the result of hearing and doing God's word.

[Jesus said,] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall.” Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV

Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Psalm 71:3 NRSV

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. . . . And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. 1 John 3:18, 23-24 NRSV

Lord, help us to take time to hear and also to act on your word. The rain, the floods, and the winds come to all of us. Remind us to dig deep, to lay a strong foundation, and to build our lives on you, the rock. Remind us again that the commandment is to love. Thank you for the gift of the Spirit within us, leading us to truth and action. Amen.

Midrash: Laying a Foundation and Building a House [B#7]

Foundations

What is a “foundation”?

What is the practical difference between building a house on rock or building on sand?

How does a strong foundation underneath your house help and protect the house?

What do you think could be the “foundation” for your life? What is your life built on?

How does a strong foundation underneath your life help you?

[Jesus said,] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall.” Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV

This is a word picture—a “simile.” What is being compared?

_____ will be like _____

_____ will be like _____

“The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house.”

Why do you think the same problems happen to both of the houses in the story?

According to Jesus, what are the differences between what the two builders did in this story (parable)?

What is the difference between the foundations of the two houses in this story (parable)?

What is the difference between the results of the storm for these two houses?

The story does not tell us what happens to the two people who hear the words of Jesus: everyone “hears these words of mine.”

What is different about the two listeners’ reactions to Jesus’ words?

What do you think will be the same about the two listeners’ problems?

What do you think will be different in what happens to the two listeners’ lives?

[Jesus said,] “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.” Luke 6:46-49 NRSV

“The Wise and Foolish Builders” is also recorded in the Gospel of Luke. The stories in Matthew and Luke have the same overall meaning. What differences do you notice in the way the story is recorded?

In the Bible God is often described as a rock.

I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:1-2

What is God like in Psalm 18?

Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Psalm 71:3

What is God like in Psalm 71?

Trust in the LORD forever, for in the LORD GOD you have an everlasting rock. Isaiah 26:4

What is God like in Isaiah 26?

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, See I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: “One who trusts will not panic.” Isaiah 28:16 NRSV

What is God’s foundation stone like in Isaiah 28?

This same verse (Isaiah 28:16) is used to describe Jesus Christ: a rock—a cornerstone—the one that we build our lives on. A cornerstone is laid in the foundation to keep the house square, straight, and strong. Everything is measured from and built on the cornerstone.

Come to him [Jesus], a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. 1 Peter 2:4-5a NRSV

How are we also like stones in God’s building?

Science Experiments [B#7]

Building Experiment:

What makes a good building foundation?

Does the soil matter?

A “foundation” needs to hold up something that is built on top of it.

What would happen to a cement block foundation with no “footings” to hold it even and straight?

What would happen on a hill if the earth washed away from underneath?

What is a strong foundation to build our faith on in the story?

Erosion Experiment:

What retards erosion, absorbs water, or prevents “run-off”?

Does the amount of water matter?

What holds up with a little/medium/large amount of water;

Does the speed of the water matter?

What holds up if the water is poured slowly/fast, sprinkled/streamed;

Does the surface matter when measuring “run-off”?

What retards erosion, a hard surface or tar or cement vs. carpet or grass or trees;

What retards erosion when measuring run-off, thick grass vs. bare soil?

What happens to the water and to each material?

What other kinds of erosion are there besides from water?

How can we build our faith so it is not eroded?

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.” Luke 6:46-49 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall.” Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#7]
Theme: Jesus' Parable of Building a House on a Rock
shows the result of hearing and acting on God's words.

[Also, remember the parable of the wise man who built on a rock from God the Father A#4]

Focus: Hearing and doing Jesus word is like building our lives on the rock.

Questions: This is a parable—a story to show a point.

What is the difference between rock and sand in the rain and floods?

What is the difference between rock and sand when the strong winds blow?

If building a house is like building my life, what should I build my life on?

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall.” Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV
- Be to me a rock of refuge, / a strong fortress, to save me, / for you are my rock and my fortress. Psalm 71:3 NRSV
- Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. 1 John 3:18, 24 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

Give ear, O heavens, and I [Moses] will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew;
like gentle rain on grass,
like showers on new growth.

For I will proclaim the name of the LORD;
ascribe greatness to our God!

The Rock, his work is perfect,
and his ways are just.

A faithful God, without deceit,
just and upright is he; Deuteronomy 32:1-4 NRSV

I love you, O LORD, my strength.

The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:1-2 NRSV

Be to me a rock of refuge, / a strong fortress, to save me, / for you are my rock and my fortress. Psalm 71:3 NRSV

Trust in the LORD forever, / for in the LORD GOD you have an everlasting rock. Isaiah 26:4 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall.” Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.” Luke 6:46-49 NRSV

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,”

and,

“A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 1 Peter 2:4-8 NRSV

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. 1 John 3:18-24 NRSV

Meditation B#8

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' parables often show that God loves and searches for those who are lost.

[Jesus told a parable:] “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” Luke 15: 6b NRSV

[Jesus told a parable:] “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” Luke 15:9b NRSV

[Jesus told a parable:] “We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” Luke 15:32 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10 NRSV

Lord, thank you that you search us out and find us wherever we are. If we read the story of the Prodigal Son and feel like the good brother who wants your attention too, remind us that you love both brothers and that we can safely rejoice with you. Remind us that you are not willing for any to be lost. Sometimes we have been among the 99 and sometimes we have been the one lost sheep—sometimes we have been among the nine and sometimes we have been the one lost coin. Give us the humility to accept your love and the courage to rejoice with each other, knowing that we are safe with you, no matter what. Amen.

Midrash: God Seeks Us Out and Saves Us [B#8]

*Read script: Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son (Luke 15:1-32) and Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10)

How do things get lost?

What would you do if you lost something important to you?

Why celebrate?

If you had the 99 sheep or the 9 coins, would you forget about them while you were searching for the one sheep or the one coin?

Why might a person “get lost”?

How is the younger son “lost” in the story of the Prodigal Son?

How was Zacchaeus “lost” as far as his neighbors were concerned?

Jesus seeks out and saves the lost:

[Jesus said,] “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.” John 10:11-18 NRSV

Script: Those Who Search for the Lost (Luke 15:1-32; Luke 19:1-10) [B#8]

Narrator: The religious men who were Pharisees and scribes complained about Jesus.

Pharisees: This fellow Jesus welcomes tax collectors and sinners and eats with them! He should not do this. He is not as good as we are.

Narrator: So Jesus told them three stories to show that he had come to seek and save those who were lost. The first story was about a shepherd and his sheep.

Jesus: What one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Narrator: The Pharisees and scribes thought that they were righteous persons, and so they were offended by Jesus' telling them about the joy in heaven over the sinner who repents. Then Jesus told them another story about a woman who had lost a valuable silver coin.

Jesus: Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Narrator: The third story was about a Father and his two sons.

Jesus: There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he wasted his property doing bad things. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be hungry. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the garbage that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "All my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us

eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with bad people, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found!"

Narrator: The Pharisees felt like the older brother. They did not want God to seek to save those who had not always done the right thing or obeyed the law as they had. Jesus' story showed them that they still had God's love and their inheritance, but God also wanted to save even more people.

Again Jesus showed them that he wanted to save more people when he met a rich tax collector named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a short person so he was sitting up in a tree in order to see Jesus as he passed through the city of Jericho. His neighbors hated Zacchaeus because tax collectors helped the Roman conquerors and the tax collectors often cheated the Jewish people in order to make themselves rich.

Jesus: Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.

Narrator: All who saw Jesus reach out to Zacchaeus began to grumble.

Pharisees: He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.

Narrator: Now Zacchaeus was sorry for the bad things that he had done.

Zacchaeus: Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay them back four times as much.

Jesus: Today salvation has come to this house, because Zacchaeus too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.

Narrator: Jesus showed in his stories and his actions that he loved all people and that he wanted to save everyone—including all who were lost.

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#8]
Theme: Jesus' Parables often show
that God loves and searches for those who are lost.

Focus: God loves and searches for those who are lost: the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the Prodigal Son.

Questions: God searches for the lost and rejoices when they are found. If you lost something that you loved and cared about, what would you do? How would you feel if you found it after searching for it?

In the story of the Prodigal Son, the first son is angry because the second son is getting all the attention, but the Father tells the first son that he still loves him and that he still has all of his inheritance—the father just wants to rejoice because someone he loves has returned.

If you lost something you loved and then you found it, would you stop caring about the other things that you love too?

Just because the shepherd has found the one sheep, does he stop caring about the 99?

Just because the woman found her one silver coin, does she stop caring about the 9 she still had?

Just because the father has found his lost son, does he stop caring about the one who has stayed with him? Why is the elder son unhappy? Can you tell from his words how he is thinking? What is he jealous of? What does he fear?

Key scripture:

- “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep [coin] [son] that was lost.” Luke 15:6b [9b] [24,32]
- [Jesus said,] “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21 NRSV
- [Jesus said,] “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

[Jesus said,] “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“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.” Matthew 13:44-46 NRSV

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: “What one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Luke 15:1-7 NRSV

The Parable of the Lost Coin

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:8-10 NRSV

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Father

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found!’” Luke 15: 11-32 NRSV

He [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay them back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” Luke 19:1-10 NRSV

Meditation B#9

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' word picture of Fishing for People shows us that God wants us to invite others.

And Jesus said to them [Simon and Andrew], "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Mark 1:17
NRSV

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." Luke 5:10b
NRSV

And as he [Jesus] sat at dinner in his [Matthew's] house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Matthew 9:9-13 NRSV

[Jesus said,] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV

Lord, remind us to keep fishing even when it seems as if there are no fish—and remind us to ask where to let down our nets. We realize that your message to the critical and self-righteous Pharisees was that none are righteous and that all sin and fall short. Thank you for your mercy to us and for your strength to give mercy and welcome to others. We claim your promise to be with us always. Amen.

Midrash: Fishing for People [B#9]
Script: Fishing (Luke 5:1-11)

Narrator: Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret [also called the Sea of Galilee] and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon:

Jesus: Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.

Simon: Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.

Narrator: When Simon Peter and his brother Andrew had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners, James and John, in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying:

Simon: Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!

Narrator: For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

Jesus: Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.

Narrator: When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Jesus often uses metaphors and similes—word pictures that compare two unlike things (people and fish). A metaphor does not use “like” or “as” (people are fish; you will fish for people), but a simile uses “like” or “as” (people are like fish; just as you catch fish you will now catch people).

Understanding a Story by Asking the Questions and Reading the Clues

First, read the Script for Luke 5:1-11 out loud

Second, find the clues to answer the questions.

Who is speaking?

Who is spoken to?

Where is it happening?

What is happening (the order of events)?

Jesus and the crowds?

Jesus and the fishermen's boats?

Jesus and the fishermen?

The fishermen's actions?

The fishermen's first response?

The fishermen's second response?

When is it happening in Jesus' life?

Were the fishermen disciples yet?

Why is it happening?

How could it be happening?

Figuring out the meaning of the story:

Why does Luke tell the story? What is he telling us?

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#9]

Theme: Jesus' word picture of Fishing for People shows us what God wants us to do.

Focus: Jesus has a plan for his followers, and he explains it using the words and actions that they know.

Questions: What does God want me to do?

Key scripture:

- [Jesus said,] "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Mark 1: 17 NRSV
- Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. Luke 5: 10b-11 NRSV
- As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Matthew 9:9-13 NRSV

- [Jesus said,] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

Jesus Begins His Ministry

Now when Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and the shadow of death
light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus Calls the first Disciples

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As they went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Matthew 4:12-23 NRSV

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Matthew 9:9-13 NRSV

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. Matthew 10:2-4 NRSV

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. Mark 1: 16-18 NRSV

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret [Galilee], and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they

caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. Luke 5: 1-11 NRSV

Soon afterwards he [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some of the women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Suzanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. Luke 8:1-3 NRSV

Note: After the Resurrection and before the Ascension when Jesus' earthly ministry was over, he continued to remind his disciples to fish for people in "all nations" and "to the ends of the earth."

Jesus Appears to His Disciples after his Resurrection

While they [the disciples] were talking about this [Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus] . Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he spoke to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." He opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. Luke 24:36-53 NRSV

The Ascension of Jesus

So when they [the disciples] had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon

you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. All these were constantly together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 1:6-14 NRSV

Meditation [B#10]

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach?

Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet shows God's invitation coming to everyone.

[In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, the King said,] “Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” Matthew 22:9 NRSV

[Peter said to the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem,] “The Spirit told me to go with them [the servants of a Roman centurion] and not to make a distinction between them and us. . . . And as I was beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. . . . If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” Acts 11:12a, 15, 17 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14:11 NRSV

Lord, help us to say yes to your invitation and help us to pass that invitation on to everyone of all ages and backgrounds. We know that you do not want us to exalt ourselves at the expense of others. We know that you do not want us to be the only guests at your great feast. For the first Jewish Christians it was hard to bring your invitation to the Gentiles, so help us to remember Peter's revelation—your invitation and your Spirit go out to all. Thank you for pursuing us wherever we are and inviting us into your presence. Amen.

Midrash: Who is invited? [A#10]

In this parable (story) God is the King who sends out invitations, but the invitation is rejected by those he first chose to come to the banquet—then he sends out invitations to everyone.

The Hebrews became the chosen people as the twelve tribes descended from Jacob/Israel and his sons. When Jesus came as the Messiah to the Jewish people, many rejected him, crucified him, and tried to eliminate his followers. But Jesus sent his disciples to carry the invitation to all the world.

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of God may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both the good and the bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.” Matthew 22:1-10 NRSV

In this parable who does the king stand for?

What happened when the king sent out his invitation?

Who was invited after the first guests refused to come?

What does this story show us about God and about his invitation to be with him?

The Gospel of Luke tells a story about a Sabbath day when Jesus went to the home of a Pharisee (a religious leader) to have dinner. Those who were there were watching Jesus carefully to see what he would do and what he would teach. Jesus wanted to show them what God was like.

First, Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath even though this was considered against the law because it was “work.” He wanted to show them that God cared about mercy to people more than about obeying the law.

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?” But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?” And they could not reply to this. Luke 14:1-6 NRSV

What does this example show about what God is like?

Then after Jesus told the guests to remember to be humble and to invite those who could not repay them with an invitation, including those who were poor or sick, he told another story of a great dinner party in order to show that with God all are invited, even though some may refuse to come.

[Jesus said,] “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.’” Luke 14: 16-23 NRSV

What kind of excuses did they use in order to refuse to come to the great dinner?

Everything was ready, so whom did the master invite?

When Jesus left them on earth, he gave his disciples a very specific job to do.

[Jesus said,] “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” Mark 16:15 NRSV

[Jesus said,] “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8b NRSV

Whom does Jesus say that the disciples should invite to be followers of Christ?

But the new Jewish Christians were not sure that Jesus meant what he said. The Holy Spirit needed to make this invitation clear to them. So the Spirit sent Peter to a non-Jewish (Gentile) Roman soldier to preach about Jesus as the Messiah. Then Peter needed to explain this to the Jewish Christians.

[Peter said to the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem,] “The Spirit told me to go with them [the servants of a Roman Centurion] and not to make a distinction between them and us. . . . And as I was beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. . . . If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” Acts 11:12a, 15, 17 NRSV

What does Peter mean by “who was I that I could hinder God?”

Jesus' Parables—What does Jesus teach? [B#10]

Theme: Jesus' Parables show God's invitation coming to everyone.

Focus: In the parable the King [God] invites his chosen ones [the Jewish people] to come to his feast [the kingdom of heaven], but they reject him and his invitation and even kill his messengers [the prophets and Jesus], so the King [God] sends out his servants to invite everyone, even those who are “unclean” or who do not follow all the law [all people, non-Jews, Gentiles]. God sends the invitation to be with him to everyone.

Questions: Who is invited to be with God? How should we act?

Key scripture:

- [In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet the King said,] “Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” Matthew 22:9 NRSV
- [Peter said to the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem,] “The Spirit told me to go with them [the servants of a Roman Centurian] and not to make a distinction between them and us. . . . And as I was beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. . . . If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” Acts 11:12a, 15, 17 NRSV
- [Jesus said,] “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14:11 NRSV

Scripture Discussion Texts

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of God may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both the good and the bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.” Matthew 22:1-10 NRSV

Jesus goes to the home of a Pharisee and challenges common practice by healing on the sabbath (even though this was considered against the law), by recommending humility and warning against exalting oneself, by recommending generosity to those who cannot repay it, and by telling a parable in which those who were first chosen reject the King's (God's) invitation and those who are not accepted in good society are the very ones who are invited and enjoy the great dinner (Luke 14:1-24):

Jesus Heals the Man with Dropsy

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?” But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?” And they could not reply to this. Luke 14:1-6 NRSV

Humility and Hospitality

When he [Jesus] noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14:7-11 NRSV

He [Jesus] said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:12-14 NRSV

The Parable of the Great Dinner

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this [to invite those who cannot repay], said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all like began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’” Luke 14: 15-24 NRSV

Note: In this parable God is the King who sends out invitations, but the invitation is rejected by those he first chose to come to the banquet—then he sends out invitations to all who would come. The Hebrews became the chosen people as the twelve tribes descended from Jacob and his sons. When

Jesus came as the Messiah to the Jewish people, many rejected him, crucified him, and tried to eliminate his followers. But Jesus sent his followers to carry the invitation to all the world.

Note: Jesus shows in his teaching and example that he himself did not discriminate. He treated all with love and respect: the Samaritan woman at the well, the tax collectors and prostitutes, the woman with a flow of blood, the children, the lepers, the poor, the Gentiles. Jesus loved all, including those who were not among the special few who could follow the law exactly.

[Peter said to the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem,] “The Spirit told me to go with them [the servants of a Roman Centurion] and not to make a distinction between them and us. . . . And as I was beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. . . . If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” Acts 11:12a, 15, 17 NRSV

Closing Meditation

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. Psalm 100 NRSV

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NRSV

Lord, remind us every day to be thankful. Show us once again how the discipline of thankfulness influences us inside and out. We do realize that the habit of thankfulness changes our relationships with others, and we know it transforms our attitudes and our actions—but we sometimes forget in the busyness and stresses of life. Remind us to say “thank you” to each other, to strangers and to friends, and especially to those whom we are closest to and too often take for granted. For health, and strength, and daily food, we give you thanks, O Lord. Amen.