

Lay Preachers' Bulletin – July 2020

To give our authors a well-deserved rest the July's lectionary notes are from 2017, which were provided by The Rev. Derwyn Costinak, Incumbent of Good Shepherd, Calgary.

July 5, 2020 – Pentecost 5

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light

- This reading is broken up into three paragraphs. The first paragraph describes people who reject Jesus because he doesn't meet their expectations, he doesn't play by their rules (16-19). The second paragraph describes people who resist Jesus because they have been kept from seeing who Jesus is, perhaps because of their overreliance on their own intelligence (25-27). The third paragraph is an invitation Jesus gives to those who would admit that they are weary and need rest from the challenges in life (28-30).
- What encouragement might we draw from these paragraphs as far as our own efforts to communicate the gospel is concerned? How do we see Jesus respond to those described in paragraphs 1 and 2? How might that inform our own approach to those we encounter who respond in a similar manner to us?
- Do you think Jesus's invitation in paragraph 3 includes the people from paragraphs 1 and 2? What are the implications of a Yes answer, and what are the implications of a No answer? Is there another way to answer the question? How quickly would we expect someone to respond to Jesus's invitation: immediately? after thinking about it for a couple of days? a few years? Would Jesus ever take the invitation off the table?
- Have you ever taken Jesus up on his invitation? How has the Christian life been for you: a difficult struggle or an easy path or something in

between? Have you ever felt burdened by your faith? If so, why would that be, since Jesus promised that his burden is light? Is the burden you have felt your own or the one Jesus talked about? How burdened might the people in the first two paragraphs be, and what would it take for them to recognize it?

July 12, 2020 – Pentecost 6

Matthew 13:1-9, 28-23

The Parable of the Sower

- The majority of Jesus's parables are intended to make one point. As a result, each part of the parable does not necessarily correspond with other aspects of life and situation. However, the parable of the sower is an exception to this. Jesus deliberately identifies what each part of the parable corresponds to in 18-23. As a result, this passage can be used to explore an overarching point of the parable, as well as delve into the point made in each of the four subdivisions.
- What might an overarching point of the parable be? To answer this question, ask what is consistent throughout the parable and what changes. In light of this, what is the bottom line that Jesus is driving at? If the seed is the word of the kingdom, what determines its effectiveness? If the word is reduced in its effectiveness, what might be done to change that? Does the parable describe an ultimate and inescapable reality about people who hear the word or is it intended to be an encouragement or warning?
- When it comes to the four subdivisions of the parable (seed on path, seed in rocky ground, seed among thorns, seed in good soil), Jesus explains what these images represent. Since it's obvious that the good soil is desired, what might be done to increase the likelihood that the seed falls there? What can you imagine might be done to remove the rocks or pull

the thorns or break up the hard path? Or maybe the point isn't to do that. Why did the sower spread the seed so indiscriminately?

July 19, 2020 – Pentecost 7

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds

- This is another passage in which the last statement of the parable itself (v 30) and the last statements of the explanation (vs 41-43) can be over emphasized because of the negative sound of the words. When this over emphasis happens, the main point of the parable can be easily missed in favour of a discussion/argument about whether Hell really exists and who goes there.
- The main point is to be found in vs 28-29. It is not up to us to try to “weed out” anyone. That responsibility is God’s and God’s alone, and what God does when that time comes is not our business. Thus, there is a very important point to be made here about the stance of openness that should be exhibited by the followers of Christ. In the parable, one can assume those working in the field continued to water and fertilize it, thus allowing both the weeds and the wheat to benefit and grow. How might such action be displayed in the Church today? What does this mean for interpersonal relationships in our churches? If you’re convinced that you’re wheat and the person next to you must be a weed, what will it be like to remain in fellowship with that person? Do you really share the peace with them before Eucharist or do you just go through the motions? Do you “fake it ‘till you make it” or do you genuinely look for Christ in them? And are you actually sure that the other person is a weed in the first place? Isn’t it better for Jesus to make that call and not you?
- In order to deal with concerns about the harsher language about the fate of the weeds in the parable, recall that Matthew is speaking to a Jewish audience whose past and ongoing experience had been one of

persecution and trouble all around them. They had been defeated and exiled twice by two empires (Assyria and Babylon), had been allowed to return to their land only to deal with opposition from local coalition, been overrun and occupied by an idolatrous empire (Greece), and were once again occupied by the iron boot of Rome. For the Jews in that day, the weeds would in all likelihood be perceived as those who were actively and unjustly opposing them. In light of this passionate desire for justice again oppression, it is understandable that the parable and its explanation would include a description of these unjust oppressors receiving their due. In this way, the negative words are to be taken as an assurance that God hears the pleas of God's people and will bring about the justice desired. What shape that justice takes and how it is applied is something to left up to God and not a responsibility that we are to take upon ourselves. The world is full of examples of such attempts already.

July 26, 2020 – Pentecost 8

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The Parables of the Mustard Seed, the Yeast and three more

- The two parables in v. 31-33 speak to the small size of the movement Jesus was beginning. In light of the fact that he never travelled outside of Israel and spent only 1-3 years actually performing his mission, it is understandable that the kingdom as displayed in this rather small way would be seen as miniscule in light of the vast expanse of the Roman empire. Nevertheless, Jesus makes the point that it will have a much greater effect than its small beginning might seem to suggest. This is certainly meant to be an encouragement to persevere in what Jesus was teaching, understanding that it will make a difference.
- In other places, Jesus used yeast as description of the negative influences of sin and false teaching. Do you find it curious that he uses yeast in a positive way about the kingdom? Holding onto the image of how yeast works, what does this say about the work of the Church and how the things we do might affect the world around us? Can this be a source

of encouragement in the midst of our concern about how many people are in our churches? Furthermore, what does the image of yeast do to any idea of the Church taking positions of power in society? How does it inform what our efforts might look like in seeing the values of the kingdom exhibited in our world?

- The other three parables speak of the value of the kingdom. Seen to be something of great worth, the first two emphasize the importance of grasping what Jesus is talking about and living into it, of making the sacrifices that inevitably come in order to see it become a reality in our lives. The last one again emphasizes the separation of the “evil from the righteous,” but note that it begins with the casting of a very wide net in order to get the maximum result. What does this say about the value of the kingdom and our efforts to apprehend it? How might the casting of the net and the catching of all sorts of fish speak to what we might expect will be the outcome of our efforts to see the kingdom reflected in our lives? How many times might we endeavour to live out kingdom values with the result that we see some unintended consequences? Is the kingdom worth the risk of collecting some things that are undesirable? Can we trust God to deal with those things as we keep trying to take hold of the kingdom?