

Lay Preachers' Bulletin

Lectionary Notes – July 2026

July's lectionary notes have been provided by The Rev. Dr. Robert Sears, Incumbent at St. Cyprian's, Lacombe and St. John's, Olds.

July 5 - Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 14 - BAS, page 366

Gospel: [Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

BACKGROUND:

Just prior to today's reading, John the Baptist, now in prison, sent messengers to ask Jesus if he was the "one to come". Jesus recounted the signs of the Messiah from Isaiah 35:5-6, and, after the messengers leave, praised John the Baptist. Our Gospel begins with Jesus giving a parable about his generation (vv 16-17), and then he explains it (vv. 18-19). His judgment comes in an enigmatic statement that, "wisdom is justified by her deeds" (v 19). The reading continues with Jesus speaking with the Father (vv 25-27), before he invites the crowd to sabbath rest and learning (vv 28-30).

TEXTUAL NOTES:

- "But to what shall I compare this generation?" (11:16):

Jesus offers a parable. It uses children at play and negative reactions to invitations to join in and play along. A probable explanation is that the different tunes of dancing and mourning suggest wedding ("we piped") and funeral ("we wailed") games of the period. More to the point, the two games represent Jesus' and John's ministries.

- "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon...'" (11:18).

Jesus' generation did not want to join in with John the Baptist and his ministry of repentance. Instead, they accused him of having a demon. Likewise, that generation did not want to play Jesus' game of discernment and celebration either. Instead, they called him a "glutton and a drunkard" (11:19).

- "Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" (11:19)

The implied criticism is that that generation chose the wrong path. Demonizing and name calling are not the deeds of the wise.

Matthew 11:25-30 - The True Revelation

This next section continues in the style of wisdom literature. It is similar to Sirach 51:1-30, especially vv 23-30.

- v 25 - "I thank you Father ... that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants"

Jesus gives thanks for the protection of wisdom. His description of those who receive the message of wisdom is surprising, if not paradoxical.

- v 28 - "come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest"

A very personal invitation and offer is made by Jesus to all who labour and are heavy laden. Jesus offers a new yoke of learning, which he describes as easy, as opposed to other teachers' more burdensome requirements.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- 1) How does a parable of children's games fit with the wisdom literature style of v 19 and the second part (11:25-30)?
- 2) What does spiritual maturity and wisdom look like, according to Jesus, and how might it differ from popular notions of "wisdom" today?

- 3) How do you make sense of God's wisdom being received by infants, the immature, and the simple or simple-minded?

LITURGICAL CONTEXT:

- The opening sentence for Proper 14, year A is: "Blessed is our Father, Lord of heaven and earth, who has revealed these things to the simple." The sentence is a version of Matthew 11:25. The word for "simple" here is "népios", which can be translated as "infant, child, immature, simple-minded" (Strong's).
- Matthew 11:28 is commonly called the "comfortable words" in the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him. COME unto me all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you" (BCP, p. 77).

July 12 - Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 15 - BAS, page 367

Gospel: [Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23](#)

BACKGROUND:

The parable of the sower begins a series of parables about God's kingdom. Jesus speaks to the crowd about the kingdom's hidden or mysterious nature. The parable of the sower speaks of the kingdom and the explanation describes why some fail to understand it. This parable seems to respond to some likely questions raised in the minds of readers in last week's reading. Exactly how the parable of the sower describes God's kingdom is not, however, given in the explanation.

TEXTUAL NOTES:

Matthew 13:1-9 - The Parable of the Sower

- "A sower went out to sow" (13:3b)

We begin with an everyday character and a common purpose. Someone goes out to plant a crop.

- "some seeds fell along the path" (v 4), "Other seeds fell on rocky ground" (v 5), "Other seeds fell upon thorns" (v 7), "Other seeds fell on good soil" (v 8).

It must be said that this is an odd array of locations for sowing. Sowing like this appears indiscriminate, perhaps even foolish, if one is just planting a crop.

Note: the Greek word for seed, "sperma", is not used anywhere in this parable. The words "some" or "other" are used in the Greek to refer to what is sown. The emphasis in the parable is on sowing and receiving. The repetition of "seed" in the English might distract listeners.

- "Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain" (v 8).

Even the "good soil" varies. The grain grew from 30- to 100-fold.

- "He who has ears, let him hear" (v 9).

Jesus indicates by this passage that his message is given to be understood. The challenge remains to how to understand the nature of the kingdom of God, even in light of the parable.

Notes from the Omitted Passage (Matthew 13:10-17)

The disciples didn't quite understand the parable, so they asked Jesus why he was speaking in parables (v 10). The lectionary leaves out this section. However, two points need mentioning.

1. Parables

Parables are like analogies, they are spoken or literary comparisons between things. Parables are often used by Jesus to reveal divine mysteries. Parables convey messages in such a way that they require certain connections to be made by the listener or reader. This requirement can make a parable appear to be concealing instead of revealing, that is, if the listener can't make the appropriate connections.

2. "kingdom of heaven" (v 11)

Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" in his kingdom parables, here in v 11 and in later parables (see Proper 16 and 17 below). Other synoptic gospels use "kingdom of God". However, Matthew is not referring to "the kingdom of heaven" as some final post-mortem destination of God's people, but the heavenly-inspired earthly living suggested in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:10).

Matthew 13:18-23 - The Parable Explained

Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower accounts for how listeners fail to understand the kingdom when talked about in parables.

- "When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart" (v 19).

This is the first of three accounts of how people hear the word of the kingdom, but fail to have it reach their hearts. Some do not understand (v 19), others retain it for only a little while (v 21), and still others have the cares of the world choke out the life of the kingdom in their hearts (v 22).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- 1) How does the apparently indiscriminate sowing everywhere reflect the kingdom of God? How does the divine sower differ from human sowers?
- 2) What are some of the key differences between the "good soil" and the other conditions of hearing and appropriating parables about the kingdom?
- 3) To what extent does the parable give us the sense that listeners actually have a say over the conditions of their ability to receive the word?

LITURGICAL CONTEXT:

- The collect for the day includes a phrase from St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Here is the larger quote:

"Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud. But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because *you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you*" (Bk I, chapter 1, emphasis added).

The position St. Augustine offers is that we are all instinctively driven to praise God, because we are made for God and cannot be at peace without him. Is there a similar universal longing for the Word suggested in the parable of the sower? How does the Augustinian position help or hinder preaching the parable in our day?

July 19 - Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 16 - BAS, page 368

Gospel: [Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43](#)

BACKGROUND:

The parable of the wheat and the tares (vv 24-30) is unique to Matthew. This parable uses the Greek word for "seed," as opposed to last week's reading, which doesn't. It is the first parable explicitly introduced as a parable about the "kingdom of heaven" (v 24). Scholars have come to think this parable as a product of Matthew's reworking (a point relevant for 13:51-52 below) of Mark 4:26-29, the parable of the seed growing secretly. Matthew provides an elaborate allegorical interpretation (vv 36-43) that emphasizes that the kingdom of heaven is of mixed company until the harvest. Patience, tolerance, and forbearance are required.

TEXTUAL NOTES:

Matthew 13:24-30 - The parable of the wheat and the tares / weeds and the wheat

- "his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat" (v 25).

There is conflict between the householder and another and there is tension at the heart of the parable: Which will outgrow and overtake the other?

- "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?" (v 27).

The householder's servants don't understand why they found weeds in the field. Traditionally, this has been thought to be darnel, a plant that, when young, visually resembles wheat. The servants suspect the householder made a mistake. He says not. Rather, his enemy has planted the other seed (v 28).

- "Let both grow together until the harvest".

Instead of pulling out the weeds early, the householder, unfazed, decides a better crop will be had by letting both seeds grow alongside one another until the harvest. Then the two crops can be separated and less wheat will be lost in the process.

Matthew 13:36-43 - The Interpretation of the Parable of the Weeds

Matthew gives a static allegorical interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares. The first part of the interpretation (vv 36-39) lists the parallels and the latter part of the interpretation (vv 40-43) gives a description of the last judgment and the separation of the "just" and the "evildoers".

- "then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (v 43).

This cheerful passage echoes Daniel 12:3. Matthew protects the Christian community from hypocrisy, and it urges patient preparation for the judgment.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- 1) How might this parable have given comfort to the early church?
- 2) How might modern communities hear the the rigid allegorical parallels?
- 3) What are the strengths and weaknesses of not addressing evil in our time?
- 4) How can we develop and promote patience in the face of wrong-doing and evil?
- 5) Is there any tension between letting good and evil grow together until the harvest in Matthew's parable and Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20)?

LITURGICAL CONTEXT:

- The sentence for the day emphasizes the strength of God's word to achieve the ends to which he has determined: "My word shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."
- How do you address situations when you do not know how God will or even could accomplish his purposes?

July 26 - Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 17 - BAS, page 370

Gospel: [Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52](#)

BACKGROUND:

There are five short parables or analogies in today's gospel reading. They do not have the richness of the parable of the sower, nor the rigidity of the parable of the wheat and the tares. All the parables in this reading, however, focus on the astonishing character and all-surpassing value of the kingdom of heaven. A short conversation between Jesus and the disciples ends the reading. In that conversation, the Christian scribe is compared to a householder, having and bringing out treasures old and new. It is a challenge to find the link intended by the lectionary selection of the two sections.

TEXTUAL NOTES:

Matthew 13:31-32 - The Parable of the Mustard Seed

- "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed" (v 31).

The set up contrasts a very small seed and its opposite. One might well expect to hear about the seed becoming a massive, tall tree. However, the parabolic pay off is unexpected. The smallest seed grows into the greatest of shrubs. Its greatness comes not from its size, but from its service in providing shelter.

Matthew 13:33 - The Parable of the Leaven

- "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measure of meal, till it was all leavened" (v 33).

One is reminded of sourdough stories. Avid sourdough bread makers keep a stash of their precious active starter. They give their bread high praise: a deep brown crust, rich, deep, flavour, and mild tang. The kingdom of

heaven is like careful preparation of the precious active starter in the confidence of its end goal.

Matthew 13:44 - The Parable of Treasure

- "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in the field" (v 44).

The following three parables are only found in Matthew. In this parable, a man found some kind of treasure out in a field. He deemed the treasure so important and valuable that he was willing to do whatever it took to raise the money to purchase the property on which that treasure was found.

Matthew 13:45-46 - The Parable of the Pearl

- "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant ... finding one pearl of great value" (vv 45, 46).

Similar to the parable of the treasure, the merchant in this parable does whatever he can to purchase the pearl of great price.

Matthew 13:47-50 - The Dragnet

- "The kingdom of heaven is like a net which ... gathered fish of every kind" (v 47).

The kingdom of heaven is like a super trawler that captures all fish. The fishermen then have a job of sorting. Matthew states that "so it will be at the close of the age" (v 49). Echoing the parable of the wheat and the tares, "angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous" (v 49).

Matthew 13:51-52 - Scribes of the Kingdom

- "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven ... brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (52).

This gospel ends with the pointed question by Jesus, "Have you understood all this?" (v 51). The disciples, surprisingly (compare 13:10) and boldly say "yes" (v 51). The suggestion is that there are Christian scribes. If we consider Matthew's adapting or creating parables, this possibly refers to him. Matthew harkens back to verse 44 and says the Christian scribe collects valuable treasure, making a parable of making parables, old and new.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- 1) How is the kingdom of heaven's value portrayed in these parables?
- 2) Who are the scribes trained for the kingdom? What are their treasures?

LITURGICAL CONTEXT:

- Sentence: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Jesus taught in parables and his words are eternal life; how then shall we preach?