

# BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Wisdom 12:13,16-19; Psalm 86[85]; Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 13:24-43

## 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

Matt 13:24 Jesus put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 27 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?’ 28 He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29 But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 30 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.’”

Matt 13:31 He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the 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.”

Matt 13:33 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.”

Matt 13:34 Jesus told the crowds all

these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. 35 This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.”

Matt 13:36 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.” 37 He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38 the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil

one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then

the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

i) The parable of the weeds (darnel, tares) and the wheat and its allegorical explanation are unique to Matthew. The suspicion that we are dealing with Matthean material and even Matthean composition is supported by sampling the vocabulary and noticing how much of it is typical Matthew (compare 8-1-3-



### Thought for the day

Again today we have two versions of a parable, the original and a later church interpretation. Communities of faith are always “mixed,” in that some people are fully engaged, some are half-hearted and many, perhaps most, are in between. What to do? The temptation to go for a radical, purified church has been a recurring one across history. The teaching of this parable is let things alone—it is not for us to judge. It could be that less committed believers may change and a welcoming, compassionate approach may enable that to happen.

### Prayer

Jesus, your compassion to all inspires us today to recognise our own need of your grace. Help us work on the plank in our own eyes before we dare offer to remove a splinter in our neighbour’s eye.

0; weeds 8-0-0-0; bear fruit 23-0-14-2; householder 7-1-4-0; to gather 7-0-1-0).

(ii) The parable of the mustard seed is found in Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19. Matthew omits the opening question in Mark and Luke, possibly because he has used the word compare at the very start.

(iii) The parable of the leaven is found in Luke 13:20-21. Matthew’s version is slightly shorter, again omitting the opening rhetorical question.

(iv) The passage on the use of the parables is found in Mark 4:33-34. In Mark, it functions as a pedagogical observation. In Matthew, it is theological, complete with a citation from Psalm 72:2.

(v) It is likely that the opening parable and its interpretation are meant to deal with issues which arose after the resurrection and perhaps even after the first missionary thrusts of Christianity. Together they address a “church” question: what do we do with people who are “in” but not “of”? How do we deal with people who are half-hearted or lukewarm in the community? The broad response is

tolerant: leave them alone and at the time of harvest all will be revealed! At the same time, the parable and its allegorical reading function as frames around another series of mini-parables, taken from the common tradition or from the sources used by Matthew and Luke. Both of the mini-parables “comment” on the parable of the weeds. The mustard seed represents astonishing growth, i.e. there is always hope, things can change. The broad “hospitality” of the mustard tree might itself be a little allegory for the Matthean community to be more welcoming! Secondly, leaven has a kind of inevitability—the bread will rise almost no matter what. The leaven will cause “rising” of its own accord. Matthew thus relativizes the intolerance of insiders.

**OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND**

Harvest is used in the OT as an image of judgment, a very natural image of sifting, as found in Psalm 1:4-6. Cf. “It is perhaps on account of us that the time of threshing is delayed for the righteous—on account of the sins of those who inhabit the earth.” (2 Esd 4:39)

**KIND OF WRITING**

There are three kinds of writing here. (i) Straight parables intended to provoke and give rise to changes in attitudes—the mustard seeds and yeast parables. (ii) A short *chreia* in the form of a question, which is answered by a citation. (iii) Allegories—the weeds and the wheat parable is at least incipiently allegorical—the suspicion is confirmed by the decoding at the end. The allegory sets up seven points of comparison:

- 1 The sower = the Son of Man (Jesus).
- 2 The field = the world.
- 3 The good seed = the children of the kingdom.
- 4 The weeds = the children of the evil one.
- 5 The enemy = the devil.
- 6 The harvest = the end of the age (or this world).
- 7 The reapers = angels.

**NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND**

Harvest as a judgment metaphor is found in Matthew 3:12; 13:20, 39. Likewise Rev 14:14-20.

**ST PAUL**

“Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For

our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Cor 5:6-8)

“And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” (Phil 1:9-11)

**BRIEF COMMENTARY**

**Verse 24** The parable, unlike Jesus’ own parables, is not particularly disturbing—it doesn’t challenge common sense etc. It does, in the form of the allegory, teach moral attitudes and practical approaches. There is, perhaps, a discreet critique of the community members who are quick to evaluate others. It is not really your business! Cf. Romans 14:1-4, which puts it very succinctly indeed.

**Verse 25** There are *two* sowings, in this parable.

**Verses 27-28** You can feel their consternation—a very real thing for us today in the church—and the desire to clean things up.

**Verse 29-30** The reply is plain: no, and in any case, it is none your business! The Lord of the harvest will see to it at the right time.

**Verse 31** The parable of the mustard seed is offered without comment, almost like a zen koan. It does bring together, however, the issues of the preceding parable, i.e. expansion and hospitality. Even though the expansion of the church can bring with it a lowering of commitment, nevertheless, hospitality is the mark of the kingdom.

**Verse 33** Even this parable takes up issues raised in the first one: yeast takes time and we have to allow the time for the transformation to take place. And yet, yeast has its own power and inevitability. Likewise the kingdom—do not give up too soon on others, or even on yourself!

**Verse 34** This rather hopeful read of the function of the parables is in tension with a similar passage between the parable of the sower and its allegorical interpretation. At least here, Jesus speaks in order that they will understand!

**Verse 36** A more allegorical reading of the parable is offered, which spells out the original message by “decoding” it.

**Verses 41-42** These verses combine original Jesus material (v. 41) with Matthean commentary (42). The language of Jesus is very apocalyptic and fits with his preaching as an end-time apocalyptic figure. Gnashing of teeth as an expression of punishment is almost unique to Matthew (8-0-1-0).

**Verse 43** Nevertheless, it all closes on a brilliantly positive note, not unlike the last parable of the Great Assize in Matthew 25. *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.* (Daniel 12:3) Cf. *And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.* (Matthew 17:2)

**POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. The owner of the field who allowed the wheat and the darnel to grow together is a reminder to us to be patient with ourselves and with others when we see everything is not right. Sometimes a preoccupation with the negative (the darnel) can blind us to seeing the positive in our own lives and in the lives of others. When have you found that a willingness to live with the messiness of the present created the conditions for future growth?
2. Have you ever found that it was through accepting the darnel that you learned important lessons for life, e.g., learning by making mistakes, or asking stupid questions, or taking foolish risks?
3. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are reminders that seemingly insignificant things can have very positive results. Have you ever been surprised by the benefit to yourself or others of a kind gesture, a small initiative, or a word of encouragement?

**PRAYER**

O God, patient and forbearing, you alone know fully the goodness of what you have made. Strengthen our spirit when we are slow and temper our zeal when we are rash, that in your own good time you may produce in us a rich harvest from the seed you have sown and tended.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

# You have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

Wis 12:12 *For who will say, "What have you done?" or will resist your judgment?  
Who will accuse you for the destruction of nations that you made?  
Or who will come before you to plead as an advocate for the unrighteous?*

13 For neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all people, to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly;

14 *nor can any king or monarch confront you about those whom you have punished.*

15 *You are righteous and you rule all things righteously, deeming it alien to your power to condemn anyone who does not deserve to be punished.*

16 For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all.

17 For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power, and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it.

18 Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose.

19 Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

What is God like? The book of Wisdom, in a long review of Israelite history, portrays God as infinite mystery, immanent in creation through Wisdom, calling us to himself and fully of graciousness and compassion.

A phrase from the book (*You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.* [Wisdom 11:26]) seems to have found its way into Eucharistic Prayer V, where we read: *You are indeed Holy and to be glorified, O God, who love the human race and who always walk with us on the journey of life.*

## ORIGIN OF THE READING

The Wisdom literature of the Bible has the great advantage of being “international” in content and expression. It is still rooted in Israelite tradition, but not narrowly nationalistic.

The Wisdom of Solomon was written at the turn of the ages, towards the end of the last century BC or early in the first century AD. The book addresses the problem of young people being drawn away from Judaism towards the culture and cults of Hellenistic Egypt. It is a little masterpiece—beautifully written, showing that the true wisdom they seek

elsewhere is to be found only in the traditions they have received. The Wisdom of Solomon was written in very good Greek, with a facility in rhetoric and deep knowledge of the philosophies and religions drawing young people away.

## KIND OF WRITING

The book of Wisdom has fairly clear sections:

- 1:1-6:21 The search for Wisdom
- 6:22-9:18 Solomon praises Wisdom
- 10:1-19:9 Wisdom in the OT
- 19:10-22 Conclusion

Our reading comes from that long section identifying the action of Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, including a long excursus on idolatry, especially in Egypt (13:1-15:9). In the course of the review or *relecture* of the Biblical story from Adam to Moses, the writer pauses in 11:15-12:2 to reflect on divine mercy



(quoted below in part) and takes it up again, very richly, in the rest of chapter 12. Our reading crosses over two sections. The first could be called “The Punishment of the Canaanites” (12:8-18) and the second could be called “Lessons for Israel” or “The Magnanimity of God” (12:19-27). The last verse 19 of our reading is the beginning of this second section.

## OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people’s sins, so that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living. For your immortal spirit is in all things. Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass, and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin, so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord. (Wisdom 11:23–12:2)

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Exodus 34:6)

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Psalms 86:15)

## THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 86 (85) makes for a great response to the reading. Notice the final verse: *But you, God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, O Lord, abounding in love and truth, turn and take pity on me.*

## THE GOSPEL LINK

The mildness, forbearance and patience of God make the link with the Gospel. Note especially the last words of the reading: *and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.* (Wisdom 12:19)

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 12** The verse is in the form of four rhetorical questions. The unspoken answer is “no one”. In this view, God is utterly transcendent and beyond the questions of mere mortals (cf. Job). Even more so, the righteousness and justice of

God—sometimes inscrutable—cannot be assailed.

**Verse 13** A reflection really on the First Commandment. Cf. *I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.* (Isaiah 45:5–6)

**Verse 14** Here the writer resumes the rhetorical questions to make the justice of God clear beyond question.

**Verses 15-16** Emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God could lead to a suspicion of arbitrariness, after the example of human monarchs. But no! God's transcendence and justice are really one, rooted in God's identity.

**Verse 17** The power of God is manifest to all. This is especially true in two cases: in the case of those who *doubt* God and in the case of those who *ignore* God or act as if there were no God. The writer is very close here to the actual context of Jewish apostates, abandoning their faith under pressure of the culture. Not unlike our own time!

**Verse 18** The switch is captured sharply in the Greek: but you (σὺ δὲ). God's absolute power and freedom are moderated by mildness and forbearance. The word for mildness is stronger in Greek, carrying the nuances of sparing or considering or even “thrift”!

**Verse 19** We are invited to learn from the example of God in our own treatment of others. He gives to all the opportunity to repent. The word used here is the familiar *metanoia* and it appears twice more in this book:

But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may *repent*. (Wisdom 11:23) But judging them little by little you gave them an opportunity to *repent* (Wisdom 12:10) The final message vis-à-vis the inhabitants of the land is fairly blunt: *So while chastening us you scourge our enemies ten thousand times more, so that, when we judge, we may meditate upon your goodness, and when we are judged, we may expect mercy.* (Wisdom 12:22)

**POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. The reading presents an opportunity to reflect on the otherness and sovereignty of God. Speaking of the Trinity, the pseudo-Denis writes in his *Mystical theology*: “outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness.”

2. At the same time, the writer offers a clear picture of God's compassion and forbearance, giving us every opportunity to respond. We really are the weeds of the Gospel, but not to be uprooted without the chance of becoming wheat.

3. It would help to make these reflections quite personal. When have I known God's patience towards myself?

**PRAYER**

O God, always greater than our hearts, always higher than our thoughts, we stand before you in silent awe. God, always gracious and forgiving, we come before, eagerly accepting your gracious love and grateful for your loving grace, the gift of forgiveness and repentance. Draw us ever more into your own divine life, created as we are in your image and likeness.

**SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS**

**First reading**  
*Wisdom 12:13,16-19*

Today's first reading is a meditation—quite philosophical—on what God is like. As you listen, see if it resonates with your own experience of God as compassionate mystery and as patient creator. Both the power of God and God's mercy come to expression here.

**Second reading**  
*Romans 8:26-27*

There are only two sentences in this remembered and loved reading from Romans chapter 8. Paul can say a tremendous amount in very few words and yet speak to the experience of believers at any time.

**Gospel**  
*Matthew 13:24-43*

Today we hear yet another parable of the kingdom from Matthew, a parable it is easy to underestimate. At the time of writing, some in the church wanted to purify it by getting rid of the unworthy members—a temptation at any age. It might be worth remembering that if we did ever come across a perfect church, my / our joining it would “change” its character immediately!

**WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS**

**Mon 21 July** *St Lawrence of Brindisi*  
*Micah 6:1-4, 6-8*

Nature is called a witness against Israel and then Israel must ask, What does God want to me? The answer in the last

line is clear, succinct and challenging.

**Tue 22 July** *St Mary Magdalene*  
*Micah 7:14-15, 18-20*

This is a prayer to God as our shepherd, a very beautiful prayer which gradually unfolds the identity of God.

**Wed 23 July** *St Brigid of Sweden*  
*Galatians 2:19-20*

The reading is special for the feast. It is only two sentences, but two very remarkable sentences. A more arresting (and more accurate) translation may be found in the NET Bible: *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20)

**Thursday 24 July** *St Declan*  
*Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13*

Our reading is full of pathos. God himself tells the story of his choice of Israel, in very poetic language. At the same time, God's expresses his consternation at the ways things have turned out. It is all expressed in a very human way, but a deep truth stands at the heart of it all.



**Friday 25 July** *St James (Santiago)*  
*2 Corinthians 4:7-15*

In this letter, St Paul reflects on the paradoxical reality of being an apostle. He stays very close to his experience and you can feel the energy of man in his desire to proclaim Christ.

*Matthew 20:20-28*

What does it mean to be a leader in the faith community? Even the apostles get it wrong, looking for glory while avoiding the path of suffering.

**Sat 26 July** *Sts Joachim and Anne*  
*Jeremiah 7:1-11*

All the prophets warn against confusing true religion with external worship. Jeremiah puts it with tremendous force and Jesus remembered his words at the cleansing of the Temple.