

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 16A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
19th July 2026



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

439 STF – Abba Father, let me be OR

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

33 STF – O Lord we are always in your presence OR

469 STF – I watch the sunrise lighting the sky

Readings: Genesis 28: 10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-12, 23-24; Romans 8: 12-25; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Hymn:

367 STF – When I was lost you came and rescued me OR

741 STF – We pray until the hour

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

732 STF – Day of judgment! Day of wonder! OR

461 STF – Come, O thou Traveller unknown

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

693 STF – Beauty for brokenness

Blessing

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Call to worship

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to notice the Spirit at work in our world.

Come, now is the time to let go of the noise of the world around you and enter into the stillness of the triune God.

Come, the Spirit of love is here, amongst us.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

439 STF – Abba Father, let me be OR

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him

Opening Prayers

God of abundance, as we turn to you in prayer, so we turn our thoughts away from ourselves and focus on you.... *(pause)*

You, gracious God, are the generous Giver of a remarkable world

- we consider the intricacy, variety and abundance of wildflowers and we are delighted and enriched
- we consider the vastness of the universe, the numberless stars in the sky and we are awestruck and humbled
- we consider the diversity of humanity – in our own lives and around the world – and we are stretched and amazed
- we consider the story of your coming amongst us in Jesus - human child, compassionate healer, wise teacher, God with us – and we are overcome with thankfulness, with wonder, with praise.

Come to us afresh today in our worship, we pray. Fill our hearts now with your Spirit of energy, hope, peace and love, that the worship we offer today may be worthy of you, who are worthy of all we have and are.

For we know that so often we hold back;

- we hold back words of praise and thanks – to others and to you;
- we hold back words of apology and regret – to others and to you;
- we hold back the best of ourselves – from others and from you;
- we are sorry and, in a moment of silence, call to mind all that has separated us from you this week... *(pause)*

Yet you do not give up on us. Even now we sense you offering forgiveness, removing from us the shame and regret, clothing us again in compassion and grace, in truth and love. Thank you gracious God that although we hold back, you never do.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

So, we turn once more to you, hearing again your call to follow and we rise, renewed, to journey with you.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Do you ever sit down and wonder about what Jesus did as a hobby? I'm not saying he used to go around and collect Pokémon cards or stamps or t-shirts, but what did he do to relax? Did he paint or draw? Did he go jogging? Perhaps he was a part of a male voice choir? Or was really into baking?

I think a likely option is gardening. This Gospel reading is from Matthew 13. Now Jesus was at a house, by the lake. He walked along a beach and crowds appeared; so many in fact that Jesus had to get into a boat, push offshore and speak to the crowds on the water. It's here that I think that Jesus loved gardening because he told not one, not two, but three parables about seeds. If you're that interested in seeds, you must know a thing or two about gardening!

The Parable of the Weeds is what we want to look at right now. Jesus spoke about a man who planted good seeds in his field. It might have been grain to be used as bread, pasta, or to feed other animals, or could have been a field of beautiful flowers; I'll leave that up to your imagination here! Yet! In the night...the enemy of the man came and planted weeds in the field, then went away. I can't help but picture a cartoonishly evil man in an eye mask and twirly moustache creeping through a field at night, planting weeds while laughing evilly!

The day came, and you couldn't tell anything was amiss. In fact it was when the heads of the good crop emerged that the weeds also appeared. The servants of the good man came to him and said "Shall we go and pull the weeds up?"

The man said "No, as you'll pull up all the good seed at the same time. Instead, do this: Let them grow together. Then when it comes to harvesting: pick the weeds first, bundle them together and then burn them. Then go back out and harvest the good crop and take them to my barn."

Now, let us not forget Jesus is telling this parable just after the one about the Sower, where crops and seeds are grown amongst weeds and thorns. Jesus is building on each parable in similar ways for people to understand and remember. With the Sower, he says that the crops grown in the weeds/thorns will grow but will be choked and may not bear harvest. Yet here, Jesus is saying to let the good and the bad grow, then when it is time to harvest do it carefully.

² Opening prayers written by Jill Baker

Its important to know that harvesting then was all done by hand. Having crops and weeds grow to full harvest would make it easier to identify which was which plant, but having to remove them one by one would take care and attention.

The disciples, brains full on all these gardening parables, asked Jesus to explain what the parable meant:

(Taken from the Message Version but use a version that you are comfortable with!)

So he explained. "The farmer who sows the pure seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the pure seeds are subjects of the kingdom, the thistles are subjects of the Devil, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, the curtain of history. The harvest hands are angels.

"The picture of thistles pulled up and burned is a scene from the final act. The Son of Man will send his angels, weed out the thistles from his kingdom, pitch them in the trash, and be done with them. They are going to complain to high heaven, but nobody is going to listen. At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of their Father.

Jesus sees us as the good crop. We can grow together in the good soil, growing big and ripe for harvesting. Jesus is saying that we will be growing amongst things that are bad, but by growing ourselves and being rooted in God, we shall be known.

God you plant us in the field so that we might grow. Nurture us. Sustain us. Help us to become the people that you know us to be.

Amen.³

Hymn:

33 STF – O Lord we are always in your presence OR

469 STF – I watch the sunrise lighting the sky

Readings: Genesis 28: 10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-12, 23-24; Romans 8: 12-25; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Hymn:

367 STF – When I was lost you came and rescued me OR

741 STF – We pray until the hour

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection is written by Raj Patta, a Methodist minister in Stockport, and contains challenging stories from his own personal experience and theological reflection – may it be a blessing and a challenge to us today.

It is now over six years since the killing of George Floyd, which triggered the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and caused many organisations, people and institutions to engage more meaningfully with anti-racism.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Sadly, there was, and continues to be, a backlash to this, including many people in the public sphere who are arguing that the rhetoric should be #alllivesmatter, for they express that in the ambit of 'all lives' mattering 'black lives' will anyway be there. However, with the reality of ongoing, unabated violence against Black people, and their torture and killing, it has been revealing to know that 'Black lives' did not and do not matter to many people, systems and structures, and therefore the cry and demand has been #BlackLivesMatter, which is a cry for justice for the oppressed communities.

On a similar note in the context of caste system, the cry for justice has been #Dalitlivesmatter, again for the similar reason that 'Dalit lives' and 'Dalit bodies' have not mattered and have been battered for centuries, for their bodies are raped, killed, tortured, disappeared, erased and even forgotten. The logic of empire, which is demonstrated by violence destroys bodies by killings, scatters bodies through terror, crucify bodies by unjust crucifixions, disappear bodies by torture, disintegrate the bio-politics of life and conveniently writes out the stories of people on the margins. Dalit lives and Black lives have not only been 'hidden transcripts' in the face of empire today, but are also 'forgotten trans-scripts,' where their lives are consciously forgotten and if otherwise are forced as 'no-humans' in our public spheres today.

The gospel writer Matthew in his reworking of Mark's account, has replaced the parable of a seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26-29) with this unique parable, which the NRSV titles as 'the parable of weeds among the wheat,' to communicate about the kingdom of heaven's mysteries to his audience. Matthew records both Jesus' narration of this parable to the crowds (verses 24-30) and the explanation of it to his disciples (verses 36-43), so that Matthew's audience would clearly understand the parable. Matthew took note of every detail in Jesus' explanation of the parable, which included that the sower is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are children of the kingdom, the weeds are the children of the evil one, the enemy is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are angels (verses 37-39). With such a fine detailed explanation of the parable, the audience of the first century Church and also the readers today will appreciate Matthew for his detailed recording of Jesus parable. However, as I read it, I recognise a colonial episteme of #alllivesmatter in Matthew's recording in those details.

There is a stark distinction between Jesus' narration of this parable and his explanation of it, where the slaves who are mentioned in the narration (verses 27, 28) are missed in the explanation. Such a conscious omission in the explanation of the parable demonstrates slaves' lives did not matter, which mirrors the reality of first century Palestine living under colonial Roman empire in the textual world of Matthew. While the rest of the characters in the parable got attention and an explanation, the unrecording, the unrecognition and even erasure of who these slaves are and who these slaves represent in the explanation of the parable exposes a deep hermeneutical problem. The slaves existed in the original story of the parable but are forgotten in the interpretation, which is only symptomatic of the then society's reality.

Though slavery and slaves existed in that context, they are forgotten in the worldview of the society as 'no-bodies,' for the slaves are treated as property, tradeable goods, 'sub-humans,' 'de-humans' and 'no-humans.' The slaves, their bodies and their lives are the 'forgotten trans-scripts' of both the texts and the society, for they are overlooked and are taken for granted as their existence is recognised in their non-existence. Many commentators chose to explain about judgement and fire in this text, lest they forget that by erasing the lives of the slaves in the interpretation, they have already (mis)judged that the lives of the slaves do not matter to the story of this parable. A decolonial reading of this text therefore challenges us to recover and reclaim the forgotten lives in the text and the context. A recovery of these forgotten lives is by 'hearing to speech' their voices, which is

an affirmation of their existence in society. #Slaveslivesmatter, #Blacklivesmatter and #Dalitlivesmatter.

Applying decolonial hermeneutics to this text, I attempt to narrate this parable from the perspective of the forgotten slaves, particularly from a Dalit perspective, for such writing is liberative and therapeutic for our communities. For a decolonial way of reading this passage, an engagement with the question of “what is Jesus doing today?” takes precedence over the questions of “what would Jesus do? (WWJD) and “What did Jesus do?” for any given text. The question may be: “what is Jesus doing today?”, allowing us to reflect on the work of Jesus beyond a textual evidence, in a way trying to say that God works mysteriously and differently than what God has always done. This framework provides a space to recognise God’s creative ways of revelation, different from the paradigms we have known by deconstructing the coloniality of texts, what Sugirtharajah calls “scriptural imperialism.”

As we are reading this text today, Jesus encourages the forgotten voices of the slaves in this text to speak, for in ‘hearing to speech’ their voices Jesus wants to join with them and with the movement for justice today. Here is Annamma, my grandmother, a first-generation Dalit Christian woman, whose family worked as agricultural labourers narrating this parable from her perspective:

For many generations, we as a family have been working under a dominant caste landlord as agricultural labourers. One fine day, we are commanded by our master to sow the seeds in the field. We worked day in and day out in getting the field ready, and as is our practice, with song and dance we collectively worked in sowing the seeds. We guarded the field day and night from the pests and took extra care of the field. One night when we were all asleep, the rival group of our landlord, who were from another dominant caste, came, attacked us and sowed weeds in our field. We resisted them but could not stop it. In that fight one of our uncles died. As the plants grew, we noticed weeds growing along with grain. At that moment I garnered all the strength in the world, stood up and repeated the words of Ambedkar, “It could be your interest to be our master, how could it be ours to be your slaves?” We told our master should we gather the weeds and the enemies? He did not encourage us to do it.

Finally, when the crop came to harvest, we first cut the weeds and bundled it and then reaped the harvest of the grain, gathering it in our master’s barn. When the harvest has come, our master called us all as a family, confessed for keeping us as slaves from several centuries, and for sacrificing our lives for the cause of land. In response to his repentance, he offered retributive justice by distributing the grain equally among us all, and made us to own equal proportion of land along with him. From then on, we all lived in equality, dignity, and justice, sharing and caring for one another without any discrimination.

When my grandmother Annamma writes this parable, she explains that it is not the master who sown the seeds, but it is them, Dalit labourers who does that work. It is their family, who collectively works and guards the field from enemies. It is their family that receives attacks and even lost a life of one of their family members in protecting the field. Grandma Annamma stood up and spoke truth to the landlord, which was costly, yet required. It is their family that cuts the weeds and then reaps the harvest. Through their acts of care for the field and resistance to the enemy, grandma Annamma and her family challenged the master to repent and offer retributive justice by sharing that land with them.

When Dalits write their own stories, they represent themselves, explain themselves and celebrate the agency of liberation in themselves. For over the years, the colonial way of thinking worked based on the story being written by the powerful, where they ‘represented others stories,’ in which process there was not only a ‘misrepresentation’ of Dalit lives and

'objectification' of Dalit lives, but also locating their version of God within this framework to which they sought *Converts*. When Dalits write they contest these misrepresentations and objectifications, and provides a sub-version of the texts. When Dalits write, they experience liberation for them.

A decolonial reading of this given text calls us to offer our support and solidarity with #Blacklivesmatter and #Dalitlivesmatter, recognising an agency of liberation in our Dalit and Black bodies, lives and texts. Never to forget, erase, overlook and take for granted the lives and stories of the people on the margins, for the divine is working in and with them. *Let anyone with ears to hear listen!*

I would want to conclude this reflection by offering a title to this given text as "The parable of written-out slaves" for 24-30 verses and "Slaves lives did not matter: Forgotten and Erased" for 36 -43 verses. Such a titling of these passages invites us to expose the 'forgotten trans-scripts' of the texts, and committing us to stand and strive for the liberation of all oppressed communities in our localities.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

732 STF – Day of judgment! Day of wonder! OR

461 STF – Come, O thou Traveller unknown

Prayers of intercession

For our intercessions, we will hold three short periods of quiet, in which each of us is invited to bring our own prayers to God.

Firstly, I invite you to pray for those close to home, calling to mind the name or the face of somebody in our own family, amongst our church congregation or a close friend. In the quiet, we hold them and their situation up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know our hearts and our hurts. We commit them to you now, and invite you to come close to those we have prayed for, bringing them your healing, your comfort, your hope.

Secondly, we pray for situations further afield – taking a moment to pray for something we have heard in the news that troubles us, or for someone we have never met but whose story has affected us. In the quiet, we hold these people and situations up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know the pains of your world. It can feel like a dark world when we switch on the news, or read our newspapers. In the darkness, bring your light. In the conflict, bring your peace. In the brokenness, bring your healing.

[Silence]

Finally, we spend a moment praying for the church: perhaps this church congregation, the wider Christian church, or all people of faith. In the quiet, we pray for all who are gathering in worship today.

[Silence]

⁴ Reflection written by Raj Patta

Living God, help us, your people, to be your hands and feet in the world. May we find ways to be an answer to prayer, to bring transformation in our own lives, communities and our world.

We pray these, and all our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

This world is alive with your blessings to us, O God.

Take these gifts, and take our lives, and bless our work to seek to follow in your way, and learn how we can follow your plan for our lives.

Come, Lord Jesus, we pray,

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

693 STF – Beauty for brokenness

Blessing

Lord, take this spark of faith in us, and turn it into a flame.

May we share the love that is at work in our lives with those we meet this week,

And may each of us be an agent of peace, inclusion and grace, we pray,

in Jesus' name. Amen.⁷

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker