



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 7A (Proper 10)

July 12, 2026

[RCL]: Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

Collect |

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Context |

The author of the Gospel According to Matthew wrote to and for a group of people who still identified primarily as Jewish. While much of his material is also found in Mark and Luke, the other two synoptic gospels, this author intentionally supports his theological arguments with scripture that his Jewish audience would have known and trusted.

The author reworks some of the material found in the other synoptic gospels, adding to it, and creating five distinct discourses that Jesus gives while on earth—a number alluding to the five books of Moses. This gospel's author makes clear: a new teaching—and a new teacher—has come onto the scene. These five movements help the reader to make sense of important hinge points or milestones within the life of Jesus. Just prior to the third discourse and to the telling of this parable, Jesus owns his role as Messiah and claims for himself the title “Son of Man.” He condemns the current generation for their disbelief, saying:

The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!
(Matthew 12:41-42)

Today's gospel lection, the parable of the sower, is the opening teaching in Jesus's third discourse and the first of three farming parables that he teaches to the crowds who gathered. This parable can also be found

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in Mark 4:1-9 and Luke 8:4-8. The difference between the versions only comes from the amount yielded from the seed. After it follow the parables of the weeds and the mustard seed. There are also parables about yeast and a catch of fish in the same discourse, with only one featuring non-food-oriented metaphors. The significance of food and harvest metaphors continues into the first miracle in this third section of Matthew: the feeding of the 5,000. Some commentators believe the yields noted in this section (“one hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown”) are impossible, while others believe that they are unlikely, but not unheard of. Regardless of the literal veracity of the numbers, the message remains the same: What we put into God’s hands will be increased, far more than we could possibly anticipate.

One more brief note about the use of parables of Matthew and Mark: while the author of Mark states that Jesus speaks in parables to *cause* confusion in the listeners’ understanding, the author of Matthew assumes that Jesus speaks in parables *because of* the confusion in his listeners’ understanding. It’s a subtle but significant difference. In the lectionary, our reading of this passage skips over the section where the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable to them (12:10-17). In that explanation, Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 then blesses them because “their eyes see”—which might be confusing, given that they have just asked him to explain the parable to them. Confusion abounds, and it seems significant that the disciples do not fully understand the things taking place in front of them and even *through* them.

Theological Reflection |

This section of the Gospel According to Matthew is heavily influenced by farming and the practical realities of working the land. In this work, Jesus finds solid metaphors for the work of discipleship. Like farming, it takes care, attention, and action. Being a disciple means maintaining a grounded sense of awareness, especially when it’s storming outside. It means caring for the fresh shoots peeking through the ground, noticing when the crops come to fruit and are ready to harvest, remembering the plants that have produced more than expected and those that have produced less. Jesus teaches that following him—the work of discipleship—is tough work, but it’s also how we develop our connection to the one who gives us life. We must pay attention as we follow Christ as closely as farmers watch the weather in the spring. And above all, we must trust in God’s providence to not only create the literal seeds the farmer sows, but also to make the figurative seeds of our life and labor grow. Growth, in nature and in spirit, requires faith in God and action on our part. Without evangelism, the Church will diminish. We can never complete the work in one generation or place. It is up to every age and all people to till the earth and to feed one another.

The gardener in this parable does not farm the way people near you might farm. What do you know of growing a garden? Does it look like what this parable describes? Instead of selecting the perfect plot of land, ensuring there is just the right amount of light and water, testing the soil for deficiencies, and sparingly and deliberately placing lines of crops, we see here the opposite approach.

In our moment, there is a movement that has been growing since COVID, called “chaos gardening.” A videos circulates online featuring someone, typically on a skate-board, with a spice shaker filled with a variety of native wildflowers travelling around their city, planting flowers by sprinkling seeds on the dirt patches they pass. Similar videos show people planting entire fields by cutting holes in bags of flower seeds and swinging it around above their heads.

Sometimes the sowers in these examples have permission to plant; sometimes they clearly do not. Sometimes they will enjoy the view once the flowers peek through; often they will not have that chance. Follow-up clips often show the wildflower patch in full bloom on the same spot. This chaos gardening does not require careful planning and preparatory work; it requires faith in the Gardener who makes all flowers bloom.

This contemporary example from our moment invites us to return to the parable. Who is the gardener? What are the seeds? And what are we to take away from this reckless extravagance? There are two ways to interpret this parable: We might see Jesus as the gardener, and we might see Jesus as the seed.

In the passage, we read that the seed that is sown is the message about the coming of God's kingdom. This message goes in peoples' ears, and depending on the "soil" it finds there, it will either grow or wither. The proclamation of the reign of God ends up in all sorts of environments; sometimes it takes root and sometimes it does not. If Jesus is the gardener, and the seed is the good news, then this parable will not have much to ask of us today.

But if Jesus is the seed and the Church is the farmer, then we are suddenly called to act. The seed must go through our hands, must pass over our fingertips and be taken to the right location to bear fruit. Now because we do not know where the right location is, we must rely on the same God the parable's farmer trusted. It is not ours to do the difficult work of choosing the perfect spot with the right chemical compounds, temperature, etc. Rather, we are called to go through the world with a spice shaker—full of the wild seeds of love and good news—distributing them wildly and lavishly. Only God, knowing the good environments and the bad environments, can make the seed crack, shake, and move toward the sun.

If we want to help grow the kingdom of God, the beloved community, we have to follow in Christ's footsteps. Jesus is asking us to get our hands dirty. Jesus is asking us to trust God to figure it out. Jesus is helping us live into the childlike faith of possibility and hopeful chaos.

So go grab your skateboard and your spice shaker: Be a chaos gardener for Christ!

Discussion Questions |

- Who planted the seed of faith in your heart?
- What environments close to you might be sown with seeds of God's love? How might you be called to throw seed on that soil?
- What lessons of discipleship have you learned from the natural world?

Faith in Practice |

Be a chaos gardener this week, sprinkling seeds of God's love and Christ's good news everywhere you go. What words—of encouragement, of hope, of recognition, of love, of truth—can you speak aloud? What loving action can you commit to offer? How might you take a concrete step to support a growing thing in a life near yours? Pray that God will bring the growth.

Sami Hency *knew a deep thirst for the Bible from a young age. Her wisdom and experience have been acquired from across denominational boundaries. Born a Southern Baptist, shaped by formative years in Messianic Judaism and later non-denominational life, she ultimately found The Episcopal Church balanced a blend of scripture, tradition, reason, and logic she'd been seeking. Her first Sunday attending St. Timothy's on Cincinnati's eastside, a lesbian couple's child was baptized. As a gay person, witnessing the inclusion and celebration of the LGBTQ+ community in the church was a turning point. Her eventual work as Communication Director for the parish has formed her consideration for language and proclamation, as well as deepened her love for the Daily Office. Sami is currently completing a Master of Divinity at Bexley-Seabury Episcopal Seminary. When not at church or studying, she enjoys biking, sketching buildings, and spending time with her partner and friends.*



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