

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
July 5, 2020 – Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 11:25-30

I really needed to hear the words from this Sunday's gospel. I felt they were written just for me. Maybe you will think the same. Here are those words of Jesus: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

These are not only timely words that connect with what we learn from the daily news, but even more to our personal lives. It's fairly easy these days to list burdensome items from the world around us. Like the pandemic that we are now suffering through, which leaves us with so much uncertainty and worries about what's ahead. We cannot forget the suffering of families around the globe. Or the fears faced by minorities, not only in the United States, but in so many countries. There are the challenges related to improving police protection, which have no easy answers. And we ought not ignore increasing climate change and global warming that affect us in many ways.

If that's not enough, we can add our personal list of burdens. They may be related to health issues or financial difficulties. Or personal challenges facing us that we have difficulty even thinking about. There are the inevitable crises being faced by members of our own family or close friends. All these burdens follow us as we make our rounds each day. And if we awaken in the middle of the night, they are suddenly right there with us. So many of us in these days are "burdened."

To all this Jesus comes to us with an offer. The gift of interior peace. The gift of assistance in carrying our burdens. The gift that not only are we not alone in our efforts to survive, but that God wants to help lift the load from our backs. And more importantly, from our tendency to think we are all alone in our struggles. God desires us to have peace in our lives and hearts. But God will not force this matter. We have to honestly and sincerely make that request of Jesus: "Come to me." I need your help.

Then we can believe that the burdens are not just ours, but also those of God. God cares for each of us, including the troubles we face. God supports each step we take, continuously helping us to move through each moment of our lives. But again, if we ignore God's presence with us in all this, we are left to face life all alone. And speaking personally, this can be overwhelming.

Again, God wants us to enjoy the rest that is promised us eternally, but also restfulness right now. Can we find the strength to ask for and allow God to help us?

David M. Thomas, PhD

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
July 12, 2020 – Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 13:1-23

I have never been a farmer, but in my two primary jobs, that of being a parent and a teacher, I tried to do what farmers did. Be a good sower. Plant seeds, and hope that something results that is alive and grows to maturity. Today's gospel is for anyone who tries to accomplish this goal.

I begin by noting there are two kinds of "sowers." The cynic sower says, "Why even try. It won't work." The hopeful sower says, "Give it a try. It might work." The one ends up doing nothing and the other does everything. Jesus prefers we be the latter kind of sower.

I was a teacher and professor for forty years. I entered many classrooms, sowed my seeds of wisdom, and then read thousands of student papers and exams. Sometimes I happily concluded that at times my seeds feel on inquisitive and open minds. Sometimes my words left me, bounced off the classroom walls and ceiling, and then fell to the floor.

I could say something similar about the parental wisdom that I sought to share with our children. Thoughts of failure or indifference never stopped me - and still don't. I wanted to be the good sower who, as the gospel begins, "went out to sow." Day after day, year after year.

And that's the way it is. Occasional successful plantings resulted, but not always. So, what are we to do? Quit, or keep trying. Clearly, Jesus would have us do the latter. Even Jesus himself knew of failure. Some listened to his words and walked away. A few stayed with him to the end, but then, went away and hid. But he remained faithful to what he felt called to do. And he invites us to do the same.

My teaching days are mostly ended, but still continue as my writing of these Nazareth pages testifies. But my parenting (and now grandparenting) "job" remains.

There are always good reasons for us to quit on tasks that we imagine might fail. We all have experienced times of an undesired or unsuccessful harvest. Hopelessness can be a tempting option. But if you want to remain as God's Spirit urges, get out there and plant a few more seeds.

David M. Thomas, PhD

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
July 19, 2020 – Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:26-33

Most of what most of us do each day is small. Our daily deeds are usually unnoticed. Our accomplishments never get into the pages of a newspaper, nor are they posted online. We pick up a discarded sock on the floor that was dropped by one of our children. We add a special touch to a salad for dinner. We empty the dishwasher or take out the garbage. We say "thanks you" to the check-out person as we leave the store. We always wear a mask in public to protect others and ourselves from Covid-19. Little things. Hardly anything. Easily overlooked.

But (a small but important word here) God notices because in the eyes of our Creator, nothing is unseen, and everything counts.

Once, Jesus wanted to teach us about measurements and significance in the world created by God. He picked up the smallest thing at hand, which was a tiny mustard seed. "Look at what's in my hand," he said to those around him. "Look at what?" they asked. "We don't see anything." "Look closer," said the Lord Jesus. "It's there in the middle of my hand."

He continued. "This tiny thing that you can hardly see will someday turn into a giant bush. Birds high up in the sky will notice it and fly down and land in its branches. For them, it will be like the Atlanta Airport, visible for miles."

Our society values size and often sings the praises of those who make great accomplishments. The world of sports honors those who win the big game. Many want "to make it big." Big seems better.

But most of life, especially in the family, is made up of countless *small* gestures of love, something Pope Francis mentioned in his exhortation on family life, *The Joy of Love*, fifteen times!

As I write this, our country is suffering through a terrible pandemic. The cause, as we all know, is a very tiny virus, proving that smallness can be very significant. Either positively or negatively. The parable of the mustard seed helps us to have a better perspective about what life, even our spiritual life, is about. Every little bit!

David. M. Thomas, PhD

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
July 26, 2020 – Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 13:44-52

I begin this reflection by quoting the first lines of today's gospel where Jesus gives one of his many images of what the Kingdom of God is like. It is a passage many will be familiar with. It's one of those "images" that can stick in one's memory. Not so much because it's meaning is clear. In fact, the opposite. It's like a puzzle that defies an easy explanation.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Mt. 13:44)

The passage starts with the "treasure" that's buried in a field. Someone discovers it, reburies it and then buys the whole field. Then leaves the treasure buried. On one level this does not make sense. If one acquires a treasure, doesn't it make sense to use it and enjoy it? That's what most of us would do. I would.

Here's my take. The field is our lives, your life and mine. "Buried" in us is the hidden meaning of our lives, God's love for each of us. We did not create ourselves. We are brought into existence and life by God who loves us even before we existed, while we are now here on earth and forever with God after we die.

God is in us, around us and above us. And we can also say that we are in God. But God's presence is always hidden or "buried," to use the image given us by Jesus. God is the great treasure buried within all that God has created, including you and me.

How do we acquire this great treasure? Get rid of anything that blocks you from attending to the good that continually comes your way. What exactly that is will be different for each of us. Your field is yours and my field is mine. No two fields are alike. What's common is the treasure.

What's so amazing about God's creation is its variety. Millions of galaxies and stars and planets with no two exactly alike. The same with us on earth - lots of wonderful diversity. We are beginning to see the need to explicitly celebrate that diversity while at the same time affirming our commonality. After all, the same treasure is hidden within all.

David M. Thomas, PhD