

ORDER OF SERVICE

Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship

Lighting of the Chalice

In the freedom of the truth
And in the spirit of Jesus
We unite for the worship of God
And the service of all—Charles Gordon Ames. (Ames Covenant)

Joys and Concerns i.e. “How goes it with Thy Spirit?”

Prayers of the People

Didactic on The Parables

Parable Study

1. **Read** the Parable out loud, sharing text if it is long.
2. **Reflect in silence** on the parable
3. **Respond** to the Parable, allowing space for silences, for more deliberative thinkers, for new insights
4. **Rest** with the Parable—which may be read a 2nd or even 3rd time.

Closing Words (unison)

Love is the Spirit of this Church and service its law.
This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace,
to seek the truth in love
and to help one another.—James Vila Blake (Blake Covenant)

Reflection Questions for Study

1. Compare and contrast the two parables; the first from the book of Mark, the second from Thomas. They are not identical, but one reviewer believes they are related. What do you think? What is the message that Jesus is trying to convey to his listeners? What are the metaphors that Jesus employs in this parable and for what purpose?
2. What importance is the size of the **mustard seed** in Jesus message? One parable Bible author wrote: The realities surrounding the beginning of the kingdom did not reflect the scope or the destiny of the kingdom...it would become a world wide kingdom. Do you think this is what Jesus was trying to say?
3. **The parable of the leaven.** Ponder this statement (from a curriculum about the parables.) Both the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven are parables of contrast. While both contrast the small versus the large, each parable makes a different point. The contrast in the parable of the mustard seed is between a small beginning and an enormous result.. The contrast in the parable of the yeast is between a small presence in the beginning and a later inescapable presence. Think about the fact that both seeds and leaven grow and work slowly. Apply this metaphor to how Jesus was attempting to conceptualize the Kingdom of Heaven. What was he trying to say?
4. **The Parable of the Treasure.** Below are excerpts from a study guide which may be useful: *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. Today people put their treasures in banks; in the first-century A.D., a field was much safer. Sometimes people would die in wars leaving their treasures hidden and unknown. Comparison: the Kingdom = treasure in a field. It is so valuable that it can transform the lives of those possessing it. When a man found it... kind of man who digs in fields in the first-century: a laborer working in a field. Treasure reveals itself suddenly and so requires an immediate, life-changing decision. He hid it again... The key of the parable: the man chooses to act to acquire the treasure. It requires quick, smart thinking. It is the owner's responsibility to know what he owns. If he legally sells it, then the person buying is doing nothing wrong. The 1st-century audience valued shrewdness as a key quality. Then in his joy... The man's reaction shows us how we should react to the Kingdom. Possessing the kingdom is about radical life-change. The emotions that accompany it spring from the knowledge that everything is going to be better because of what the Kingdom makes possible. Went and sold all he had and bought that field. Kingdom must be taken by forceful action. The Kingdom pushes people to make a decision about it. Selling everything - is it foolhardy to give up what's worthless for something that is priceless? Rather, this is true wisdom. (From Modern Parables: Living in the Kingdom of God," Study Guide, by Thomas Purifoy & Johnathan Rogers.*

²⁰Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

(Gospel of Thomas) Jesus [said], "What the kingdom of the father resembles is [a] woman who took a small amount of leaven, [hid] it in some dough, and produced huge loaves of bread. Whoever has ears should listen!"

The Treasure in the Field,

Matthew 13: 44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Gospel of Thomas 109: Jesus said, "What the kingdom resembles is a man who possessed a hidden treasure in his field without knowing it. And [upon] dying he left it to his [son]. The son [was] not aware of the fact. He assumed [ownership of] the field and sold it. And the person who bought it came plowing, [found] the treasure, and began to lend out money at interest to whomever he wished."

The Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13: 45-46. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

(Gospel of Thomas) Jesus said: The kingdom of the Father is like a merchant who had a load (of goods) and found a pearl. That merchant was wise. He sold the load and bought for himself the pearl alone. You also, seek after his treasure which does not fail (but) endures, where moth does not come near to devour nor worm to destroy.

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

(TWO PARABLES PER SESSION)

	Month
Forgiveness and Grace	October
The unforgiving slave, Matthew 18: 23-35	
The workers in the vineyard, Matthew 20: 1-6	
Love for the Lost and Hope for the Found	November
Lost sheep, Matthew 18: 12-14/Luke 15: 4-7	
Thomas 107; Gospel of Truth 31-32	
The Lost Coin, Luke 15: 8-10	
The Prodigal Son, Luke 15: 11-32	
Parables of Exemplary Behavior	December
The Good Samaritan, Luke 10: 25-37	
The Rich Fool, Luke 12: 16-21 Thomas 63	
The Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16: 19-31	
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18: 10-14	
Wisdom Parables	January
The Wise and Foolish Builders Matthew 7: 24-27/Luke 6: 47-49	
Building a Tower, Luke 14: 28-30	
The King Going to War, Luke 14: 31-33	
The Unjust Manager, Luke 16: 1-8	
The Faithful and Wise Slave, Matthew 24: 45-51/Luke 12: 42-46	
The Ten Maidens, Matthew 25: 1-13	
Parables of Life before God	February
The Sower and its interpretation: Mark 4: 3-8, 13-20	
Matthew 13: 3-8, 18-23//Luke 8:5-8, 11-15, Thomas 9	
Children in the Marketplace Matthew 11: 16-19/Luke 7:31-35	
The Two Debtors, Luke 7: 41-43	
The Two Sons, Matthew 21: 28-32	
The Friend at Midnight, Luke 11:5-8	
The Father's Good Gifts, Matthew 7: 9-11/Luke 11:11-13	
The Barren Fig Tree, Luke 13: 6-9	
The Slave at Duty, Luke 17: 7-10	
The unjust Judge, Luke 18: 2-8	
The Waiting Slaves, Mark 13: 34-37/Luke 12: 35-38	
The Talents, Matthew 25: 14-30	
The Pounds, Luke 19: 12-27	

Parables of the Kingdom

Parables of Final Judgment

March

The weeds in the wheat and its interpretation

Matthew 13: 24-30, 37-43, Thomas 57

The Dragnet and its interpretation, Matthew 13: 47

The Final Judgment, Matthew 25: 31-46

Allegorical Parables

The Great Banquet, Luke 14: 16-24, Thomas 64

April

The Wedding Feast, Matthew 22: 1-14

The Wicked Tenants, Mark 12: 1-12//Matthew 21: 33-46/
Luke 20: 9-19; Thomas 65-66

Parables of the Kingdom

May

The seed growing secretly, Mark 4: 26-29; Thomas 57

The Mustard Seed, Mark 4: 30-32//Matthew 13: 31-32

Luke 13: 18-19; Thomas 20

The Leaven, Matthew 13: 33//Luke 13: 20-21; Thomas 96

The Treasure in the Field, Matthew 13: 44; Thomas 109

The Pearl of Great Price, Matthew 13: 45-46; Thomas 76

I. “The Seed Growing Secretly”

Read aloud both parables; compare and contrast their meaning:

The Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4: 26-29) He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

From the Gospel of Thomas, Saying 57(57) Jesus said, "What the kingdom of the father resembles is a man who had a [good] (kind of) seed. His enemy came at night and scattered grass seed in with the good seed. The man did not let them pluck out the grass, saying to them, 'Do not, lest you (plur.) go to pluck out the grass and then pluck out the wheat along with it. For, on the day of the harvest the grass will be obvious, and it will be plucked out and burned.'"

II. The Mustard Seed

Jesus asked, "How can we show what the kingdom of God is like? To what can we compare it? ³¹It's like a mustard seed planted in the ground. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds on earth. ³²However, when planted, it comes up and becomes taller than all the garden plants. It grows such large branches that birds can nest in its shade." (God's Word Translation)

³¹ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³² which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." (New King James Version)

¹⁸Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us what Heaven's kingdom is like."

He said to them, "It's like a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large plant and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky."

III. The Kingdom of God is like leaven

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount^[4] of flour until it worked all through the dough."