

Litanies and Reflections based on Bible Themes

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Matthew - Parables (2002)

As sabers rattle in lands both close and distant
we confess that we are in pain,
fear has taken root in the souls of our being.

*Even as we turn to the parables,
familiar stories that we thought we loved,
we find troubling stories offering ever more
questions.*

**Lord have mercy,
lord have mercy,
have mercy upon us.**

We are loathe to take account of the many
ways

in which we unwittingly profit
from the machinery of war and greed.

*Still we read the parables of Jesus
which fly in the face of social convention
offending those who dare to listen.*

**Christ have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
have mercy upon us.**

Believing that we are insignificant,
and at the same time fearful that we might
become so,
we are timid to use our voices to speak truth to
a world of war.

*Now the parables of Jesus offer a new vision;
now the servants dine and the masters serve,
now the last becomes and the first becomes
last.*

**Lord have mercy,
lord have mercy,
have mercy upon us.**

Hear the good news of the Story
that no sheep is unworthy of rescue,
no coin too small to be missed.
Hear the good news
that love is stronger than hate
and that this power is alive within you
now and forever.
Amen.

Matthew 5 - see 1 Samuel 17:1-58 - Turning a Cheek
(1997)

Matthew 6:9-13 - see Luke 11:2-4 - Lord's Prayer
Litany

Matthew 6:25-27

Look at the birds of the air;
they neither sow nor reap nor gather into
barns
and yet God provides for the basic sustenance
of life.

May our hearts be open to trust you.

Look at the birds of the air;
they neither study nor plan nor plot their
course
and yet God writes the instinct for migration
into their hearts.

May our eyes be open to see you.

Look at the birds of the air;
they neither talk nor vote nor debate their
responsibility
yet God weaves them into communities which
nurture and defend.

May our hands be open to serve you.

Matthew 9:9-13 (1999)

Jesus calls
even today
tax collectors and Pharisees
high achievers and impish children.
Jesus calls
even today.

Matthew 10:34 and Luke 12:51 (1998) - Swords and
Plowshares

*We bring swords
that you turn into plowshares.
We bring expectations of peace
and you meet us with swords.*

*God
help us.*

Matthew 10:40 (1999)

Jesus said:
"Whoever welcomes you
welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me
welcomes the one who sent me."
Let us welcome a stranger.
Let us welcome God.

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Matthew 11:15-17 (1999)

*Let anyone with ears listen!
To what will we compare this generation?
Children sitting in the marketplaces and
calling to one another, 'We played the flute for
you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you
did not mourn.'* (Mt 11:15-17)

God's flute plays in our souls. Will we dance?
God's voice weeps in our hearts. Will we
mourn?

Matthew 13:1ff and Luke 8:4ff, Mark 4:1ff

Benediction
In the name of the God
who creates see and calls each one good;
In the name of the God
who knows the dangers of weeds and thorns;
In the name of the God
who carries safely to good soil, now and
forever;
In the name of the God
go forth from this place to blossom and bear
fruit. Amen.

Matthew 13:3-9 - see Genesis 19 - Sower meets Lot

Matthew 13:31 - Litany of Parables (1999)

The kingdom of God is here, and coming.
A mustard seed that someone took and sowed
in his field; 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.

The kingdom of God is here, and coming.
Yeast that a woman took and mixed in with
three measures of flour
until all was leavened.

The kingdom of God is here, and coming.
Treasure hidden in a field, which someone
found and hid;
then joyfully sells all he has and buys the field.

The kingdom of God is here, and coming.
A merchant in search of fine pearls;
on finding one of great value,
sells all of his possessions and buys the pearl.

The kingdom of God is here, and coming.
Let all who have ears, hear.

Matthew 15:21-28 - see Mark 7:24-30

Matthew 16:13-20 - see Mark 8:27-33

Matthew 16:25 (Mark 8:35) - Losing One's Life (2002)

Those who want to save their lives
**have good health insurance,
pay their bills on time,
exercise and eat right...**

Those who want to save their lives
will lose them.

Those who lose their lives
in pursuit of God

**who abandon the world's values,
who live generously and faithfully,
who listen to a voice beyond...**

Those who lose their lives
in pursuit of God
will find life.

May we learn the value of loss.

**May we know the value of life.
Amen.**

Matthew 17:1-6 (Mark , Luke 9) Transfiguration

Litany (1997)

We have seen the light of God;
**on high mountains of celebration
and in the ecstasy of a lover's embrace.**

We have seen the light of God;
**through the bitter scorn of betrayal
and the searing chasm of grief.**

We have seen the light of God;
**with eyes that have been shaded,
with eyes that have been opened,
with eyes that have been blinded.**

We have seen the light of God.

Confession and Assurance (2000)

He came bathed in light, dazzling, radiant...

**Forgive us, God, for accepting mediocrity in
your name and calling it good enough.**

He came appearing with Elijah and Moses...

**Forgive us, God, for demanding exclusive
expressions of faith even in the face of your
expansive vision.**

He came while a voice was shouting, "this is
my Beloved; listen!"

**Forgive us, God, for silencing the voice of
the other struggling to praise your name.**

He came and she comes.

She came and he comes.

They come as they came

bathed in light, appearing in communion,
shouting for all who have ears to hear...

for all who have ears to hear.

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Matthew 18 (1999)

"Truly I tell you," says Jesus,
"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in
heaven, And whatever you loose on earth will
be loosed in heaven."

To bind, to be bound, to be bound with
So many competing demands and expectations
Aging partners and parents
Unplanned expenses
Demands at work and home and school and
church
Bound

Bound now
Bound forever
Bound with whom and for what?

What shall we carry with us into eternity?
Our gold? Our politics? Our relationships?
Which?
For with this choice
We will be bound in heaven.

Dear God,
May we bind with care.

Matthew 18 (2002)

"Truly I tell you," says Jesus,
"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in
heaven,
And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed
in heaven."

May we be bound with love.

We are bound with so many competing
demands and expectations;
Aging partners and parents;
Unplanned expenses;
Demands at work and home and school and
church.

May we be bound with love.

Bound now, bound forever;
but bound with whom and for what?

May we be bound with love.

What shall we carry with us into eternity?
Our gold?
Our politics?
Our relationships?
Which?
For with this choice
We will be bound in heaven.

May we be bound with love.

Matthew 18:21-35 (2002)

forgiven and unforgiving
the servant becomes master
forgiven and unforgiving
greed overpowers compassion
forgiven and unforgiving
ripe fruit left on the vine,
rotting and useless.

Matthew 20:1-16 (2002)

A grueling day in the vineyards
bone weary
grateful for the waning sun
proud of the accomplishments
superior even.

Imagine the surprise
the last receives as the first
all compensate equally
not equitably.

How then is justice defined?
Is there no reward for the toil?

Haunting words are all that's left
an echo reverberating over time
"the last shall be first and the first shall be
last"

Matthew 20:1-16 (with echoes of Micah 6:8)

Already overburdened with the demands
of work and leisure, family and friends,
we come to this place in search of rest.

May we find here

the strength to work for justice.

Forgiveness is elusive and anger is justified,
too often we settle for the sweet fleeting fruit
of revenge.

May we find here

the patience to embody mercy.

Deluded by the world in which we live
receiving power and prestige and money as
just reward

missing the Spirit's call

to a life grounded in humble service.

May we find here

the wisdom to walk in the Spirit.

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Matthew 18:1-3 - Litany of Greatness - Matthew
23:12, Luke 14:7-10, Luke 18:9-14

Now Jesus told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, "When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you." (Luke 14:7-10)

For every one who exalts themselves will be humbled, and they who humble themselves will be exalted.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:1-3)

For every one who exalts themselves will be humbled, and they who humble themselves will be exalted.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." (Luke 18:9-14)

For every one who exalts themselves will be humbled, and they who humble themselves will be exalted.

Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move

them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 23:1-11)

For every one who exalts themselves will be humbled, and they who humble themselves will be exalted.

Matthew 22:1-10 (2002) - Wedding Banquet

The invitations are sent
the regrets received
the food is ready
and the table is empty.

A celebration
is not
without the celebrants.

The kingdom of god...
celebration?
or place of meeting?
triumph or encounter?
Herein lies the challenge
the invitation for repentance.

The invitations are sent once more
accepted by the oft' forgotten
the table is filled and overflowing
the kingdom of god arrives.

There is a space in the pew beside us.
There is an empty seat at our table at home.
There is room in our car, on our couch, in our lives.

Whom then shall we invite?

The doctor the lawyer the banker?
The mother the neighbor the friend?
The homeless the outcast the poor?

Whom then shall we invite?

Maybe we are planning an event.
Maybe we prefer to dine alone.
Maybe,
just maybe,
we are ready to encounter the kingdom of God.

Whom then shall we invite?

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Matthew 22 - see also Exodus 20 - Ten Commandments (2002)

Matthew 22:34-40 (Mark 12:28, Luke 10:25) (2002)

Once upon a time
a wise man offered a challenge;
"What is the greatest commandment?"

The calendars on our desks share a vision of greatness;
bills to pay, phone calls to return,
appointments to keep.
Love the Lord your God.

The cameras of our memories share what commands us;
children to bathe and partners to help
parents calling and grandchildren hopeful.
**Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.**

Still the Spirit lures us to new priorities;
open spaces to experience wonder,
strangers becoming friends,
devotion to that which transcends.
**Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.
Love your neighbor as yourself.**

Matthew 23:1-11 - see Matthew 18:1-3 - Litany of Greatness

Matthew 23:12 (2002)

Searching for greatness
Christ is encountered in service.
Pausing to remember
New life awaits our embrace.
Striving for meaning
Whispers of peace beckon within.

Matthew 25:1-13 (1999)

Ten lamps gathered,
with oil enough for all.
Ten lamps gathered,
But five are empty
showing careless disregard.
Ten lamps gathered,
Five blaze with oil
abundant enough to share.
Ten lamps gathered,
Five lifeless
when laziness and greed collide.

Ten lamps gathered...
How many will burn tonight?

Creator God, giver of oil, hear us as we pray...
For generous hearts to share oil with our neighbors.

Creator God, giver of oil, hear us as we pray...
For the vision necessary to leave our comfortable seats in search of oil.

Creator God, giver of oil, hear us as we pray...
For forgiveness for the ways our selfishness and our apathy collide.

Ten lamps gathered, with oil enough for all.
Come children of God, into a sacred circle
Where sharing creates abundance
And no one leaves hungry. Amen.

Matthew 25:14-30 (2002)

we have talent
precious metal
protected, hoarded.

we have talent
symbolic worth
invested, growing

we have talent
opportunity unfolding
sharing, giving

Matthew 25:31-46 (2002)

Looking for the king
Christ lives in the prisoner.
**Whenever we see the captive and the lost,
we see Christ.**

Serving in the palace
Christ lives in the homeless.
**Whenever we touch the last and the least,
we touch Christ.**

Listening for the powerful
Christ lives in the vulnerable.
**Whenever to hear the frail and the lonely,
we hear Christ.**