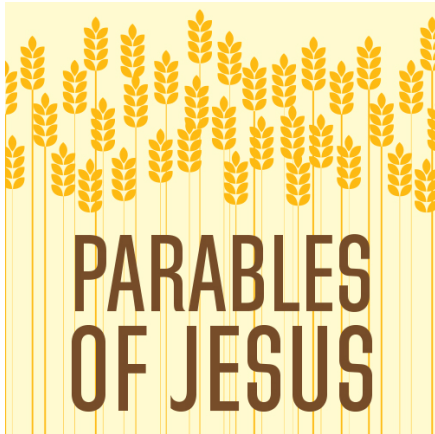


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October 2–November 20, 2022

Parables of Jesus



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– Matthew 13:10-11

Week 1: October 2, 2022

Kingdom Parables

Mark 4:3-20

Connect:

Are you someone who enjoys gardening and attending to plants, or do you fall more under the "unsuccessful" gardener title? Why do you think that is?

Engage:

Read Mark 4:3-20

1. What are the four types of soil on which the seed falls and how does it relate to Jesus' explanation for the different ways people respond to his teaching?
2. How do you explain why some people embrace the Christian gospel and others don't?
3. Do you think Jesus means that once you reject the gospel, you will never embrace it in the future? How does this agricultural metaphor expand your understanding of faith?
4. In Mark 4:10-12, Jesus suggests that he teaches in parables to confound outsiders. What would be the threat if non-disciples fully understood his message? How did speaking in parables give him time to spread his gospel?

Apply

Jesus uses parables not to teach morality but to illuminate what the Kingdom of God is all about. Jesus reminds us that we can close off our hearts to this good news. Fortunately, there will be many seasons when we hear the gospel.

Which type of soil best describes your current experience of your faith? How can you improve your "soil" at this stage of your life?

Pray

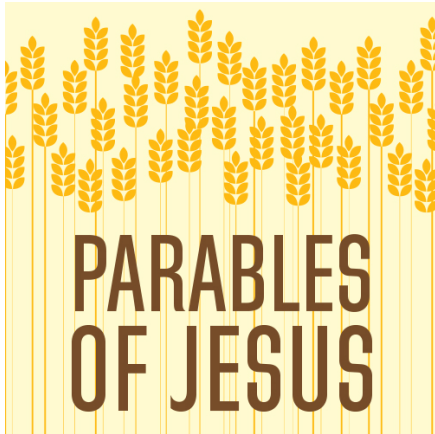
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Week 2: October 9, 2022

Kingdom Values

Matthew 13:44-46

Connect:

What or who is most precious to you? What sacrifices would you make to obtain or keep these things? To care for these people?

Engage:

Jesus likens the treasures described in these parables to the kingdom of heaven. When found, a person would give up everything to obtain them.

Read Matthew 13:44-46

1. What aspect of your faith do you treasure the most? The community, the assurance, the ritual, salvation, helping others, etc.?
2. What kind of energy and resources do you give to nurture your faith? Emotional, physical, social, intellectual, time, money, talents?
3. What does it cost you to be a follower of Jesus? Politically, socially, professionally, etc.?
4. We live in an environment where our faith is rarely threatened and therefore, it often costs us very little to follow Jesus. What would it be like to live in a country where Christians were a persecuted or marginalized minority? Do you think it would increase or diminish the value you place on your faith?

Apply

The kingdom is precious and brings joy when it is discovered. However, taking it for granted is not an option, for the kingdom of God is a gift that transforms our lives.

How can you develop a greater appreciation for your faith? What would you be willing to sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom of heaven?

Pray

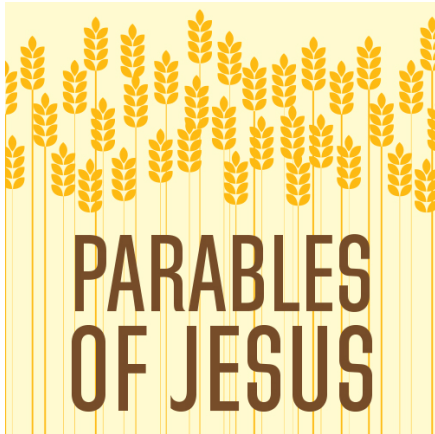
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Week 3: October 16, 2022

Kingdom Discipleship

Luke 10:25-37

Connect:

Describe a time when your safety was threatened. What kind of help did you need and receive?

Engage:

This familiar parable is set in the same locations referred to in Psalm 23 – the valley of the shadow of death. His listeners knew this route was dangerous to travel on alone due to thieves and robbers.

Read Luke 10:25-37

1. Given the cultural and religious requirements to give aid to strangers, what excuses do you imagine the priest and Levite gave when stepping over the "half-dead" man?
2. We all have reasons for turning away from people in need. What justification do you often give? Do you think there is ever a justifiable reason to turn aside?
3. The Samaritan, an enemy of Jesus' audience, responds with compassion. What challenges do you imagine the Samaritan might face for helping the "half-dead" man? How might his actions have been misunderstood by a presumably Jewish innkeeper (the roadway between Jerusalem and Jericho was in Jewish, not the Samaritan territory.) What do you think his fellow Samaritans might think of his compassion?
4. Why do you think Jesus made the Samaritan the hero of the story?

Apply

Discipleship deepens when applying faith and putting it into action. When our neighbors are in need, there are no excuses, no loopholes. Instead, we respond with compassionate action. We grow in our love for God by loving and caring for others.

How can you be more merciful and compassionate to those around you? In particular, how can you be more understanding of those who irritate or annoy you?

Pray

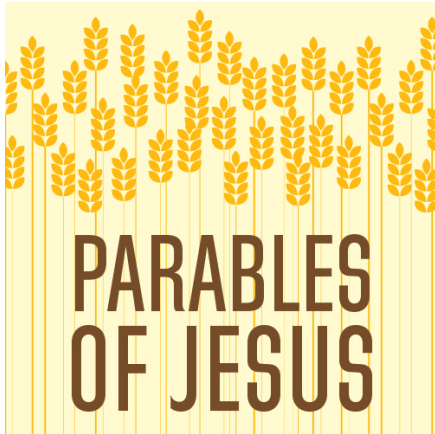
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Week 4: October 23, 2022

Kingdom Money

Luke 12:16-21

Connect:

How would you like to be remembered when you die?

Engage:

Jesus uses this parable to address the issue of greed, warning that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15)

Read Luke 12:16-21

1. How would you define the word greed?
2. Notice how many times the person in the parable uses the word "I." How does greed play a role in becoming more and more self-centered?
3. While the parable speaks of building bigger barns, what other types of acquisitions could apply? Power, status, wealth, beauty, possessions, etc.?
4. When have you pursued "more and more" in your life? How satisfied were you with the outcome?
5. What do you think Jesus means when he states that you should be "rich toward God?"

Apply

God did not give us money to increase our wealth. Instead, money is a resource to be shared for the sake of God's kingdom. Yes, our personal financial needs are part of that kingdom, but so are the needs of the vulnerable in our city. It's not about building bigger barns but about building up others!

In this season of your life, how can you become more other-centered and less greedy?

Pray

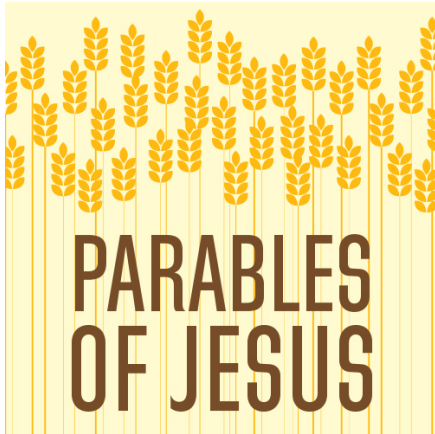
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Week 5: October 30, 2022

Kingdom Prayer

Luke 11:5-8

Connect:

Describe a time when you felt welcomed into someone's home or their lives.

Engage:

In this parable, Jesus is teaching his disciples about prayer. In their culture, people lived in village compounds, sharing common walls, a community oven, and other resources. Also, when a guest arrived, the entire village would be responsible for welcoming and providing for the guest's needs. The failure to extend hospitality would bring shame onto the family.

Read Luke 11:5-8

1. How would you describe prayer? Does God have any obligation to us or us to God when we pray?
2. Jesus contrasts the man's selfishness (staying in bed) with the cultural expectation that one should avoid shame at all costs (the asker's persistence). How do you think this applies to prayer? To your understanding or experience of God?
3. Jesus contrasts human fathers, who give good gifts to their children, with God, who gives disciples the greatest gift: the Holy Spirit. Jesus suggests all we need to do is ask. How does this square with your experience of prayer?
4. We are told to ask, seek, and knock. How does the Lord's Prayer, given to us in the passage right before this one (Luke 11:1-4), provide insight on what we are encouraged to ask in prayer?
5. How does reframing prayer as an act of God's hospitality influence what we ask for?

Apply

Prayer is much more about trusting in God's goodness than giving God our laundry list of wants. God will respond to our prayers, longings, and hopes. The answers may not always be what we want, but God never leaves us empty-handed.

How can you engage more in prayer this week?

Pray

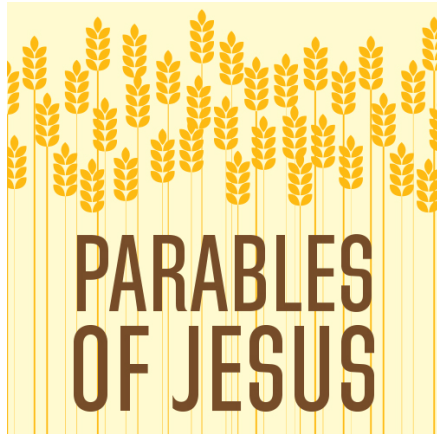
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Week 6: November 6, 2022

Kingdom Inclusion

Luke 15:11-32

Connect:

Did you or one of your friends ever physically run away from home or "run away" from your parent's values?

Engage:

Many cultures are not surprised when a young person may "sow their wild oats." During Jesus' time, desolate living was not the main problem here. It was the demand for an inheritance, which, to the listeners, would have been interpreted that the son wanted his father dead. This would have been a very shaming request on the son's part and would have brought disgrace upon all family members. The addition of unrighteous living, including caring for pigs, would have intensified that shame.

Read Luke 15:11-32

1. List all the ways you think the younger son brings shame onto his family. Which of these "sins" would have been the most outrageous in your culture?
2. When the younger son is at his lowest, what do you imagine he feels? What is his motivation to return?
3. Knowing he has shamed his family, and his father in particular, how does he design his "pitch" to be successful? What is he admitting to? How does he think his solution will mitigate that shame?
4. The father surprises everyone with his response. What do you think this communicates about God's grace?
5. The older son acts in the most culturally appropriate way. However, his younger brother humiliated the family and his return would remind everyone of that shame. So how does the father's reaction to the older brother expand our understanding of shame, forgiveness, and salvation?

Apply

Jesus reminds us that the kingdom is about the inclusion of lost souls. We must set aside our judgmental attitudes to experience the hospitality of grace that Christ offers. This story challenges us and asks, "Would we let "those" people into our churches and homes?" Let's hope we would be like the father in the story – looking for and then celebrating the homecoming of the beloved.

What is your takeaway from this story? How can you experience more of God's grace this week?

Pray

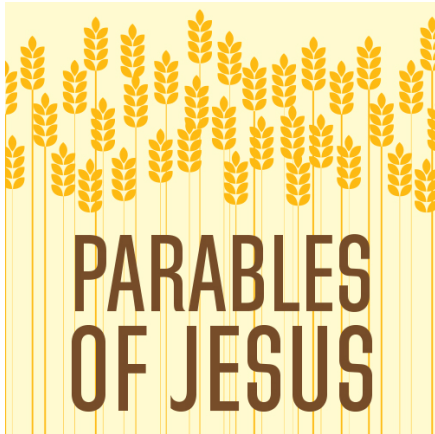
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Week 7: November 13, 2022

Kingdom Judgment

Matthew 13:24-30

Connect:

Describe a time when someone betrayed you.

Engage:

Sowing weeds in someone's field was punishable by death in the ancient world. Without the modern benefit of pesticides, an area overrun with weeds would be impossible to fix and economically devastating.

Read Matthew 13:24-30

1. Jesus tells this parable right after he tells the parable of the sower (week 1 in the series). In this, he seems to know that weeds will grow alongside the seed of the good harvest. So how does this parable illustrate the challenge of corruption in the church?
2. Who decides what are weeds and what are wheat?
3. According to this parable, what are we supposed to do when we recognize the weeds among the wheat? Are we supposed to stand by and allow the community of faith to be polluted? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think Jesus cautions us to wait until the final judgment to destroy the weeds? What is it telling us about tolerance, judgment, and grace?

Apply

There is no possibility that we could fairly judge another person's heart. Wheat and weeds grow together, but it is not our job to glean out the bad plants.

When we disagree with someone, we tend to believe that we are the ones who are right. So how can you apply this parable to someone you think is corrupt or in the wrong?

Pray

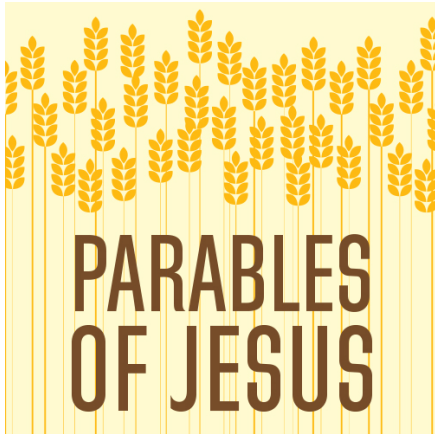
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Week 8: November 20, 2022

Kingdom Grace

Matthew 20:1-16

Connect:

Describe a time when you felt like you were treated unfairly.

Engage:

In Jesus' time, there were all sorts of political and religious divisions, each group claiming superiority in God's eyes. The Jewish hope for a messiah meant rescue and salvation for their people only, not the Gentiles. But Jesus had an inclusive vision whereby he would welcome all people into the family of faith.

Read Matthew 20:1-16

1. The earliest hired workers are angry. Do you imagine this as entitlement, jealousy, or a legitimate demand for justice?
2. Is the landowner unfair, generous, or both? Why?
3. The landowner appeals to the fact that he kept his promise to the workers. He claims some workers are envious because he is generous. What is our version of the "johnny-come-lately" complaint?" Where do you see similar attitudes in the church
4. What is Jesus saying here about grace and inclusion?

Apply

Grace is not about fairness; it is about unmerited love. It doesn't matter when or where you put your faith in Christ. What matters is that you embrace God's love when you recognize it!

Many of the parables included warnings against having judgmental and self-serving attitudes. Looking back on this series, what wisdom can you implement more readily in your life?

Pray

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