

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## The Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Most of us want everything to be perfect. That's why advertisers are always promising us the perfect car, the perfect vacation, or the perfect meal. But those of us who live in the real world (hopefully that includes all of us) know from experience that "perfect" is not something that's a part of ordinary life. Every day, for instance, we look in the mirror and we are reminded of certain imperfections.

But shouldn't something that God creates be perfect? This was an issue faced by Jesus when he announced that God's kingdom was now beginning. So what would those who received this information think? Would they want a mighty nation similar to Israel during the reign of King David? Would they expect conditions to change and a return to life as they might imagine it was in the Garden of Eden? In other words, how "perfect" would the Kingdom of God be? And, a related question would be: How perfect would the lives of those living in that kingdom be? Jesus believed that some good images would help them to understand some of the kingdom's characteristics.

### A Gospel Word for the Home

#### Matthew 13:24-43

Think about mustard seeds and weeds sprouting at the same time. These images were familiar to those who first heard Jesus. Mustard seeds are among the tiniest of all seeds, but they produce a rather large and impressive bush. So, the mustard seed starts small, and eventually, if all goes well, it grows much larger. That's partly the way it is with God's word. It starts as a small seed and it grows much larger, just like much of God's creation. Don't expect too much before its time. Be patient. Rome wasn't built in a day, nor is God's kingdom. In fact, we shouldn't expect magnificent results. They can deceive us, and may not at all be a part of what God intends.

Next, there is the whole matter of weeding the field. Reading between the lines, we might conclude that Jesus is very concerned about each and every stalk of grain. In kingdom terms, God treasures each and every member of his kingdom. So, be careful about pulling up growing things. You may "accidentally" pull up something that is needed by everyone. Let God be in charge of weeding.

If applied to us, it's a warning about making quick judgments about others. We have it in our bones to judge others – the good and the not so good. But really, everyone is a mix of both. Humans are a complex lot, filled with some good qualities, and some qualities that could use improvement. The real world is messy, just as families are. Jesus is saying that this is normal. Don't look for perfection where it can't be found. Be generous in accepting others, and ourselves as persons in process. We are all "on the way" or as the Church says, a pilgrim people not yet arrived.

## Parent Survival

We can be very hard on ourselves. Parent perfectionism happens. We want to provide our children with every opportunity to be happy and healthy. Magazines publish articles that give advice on being the perfect parent. Occasionally the claim will be softened with inclusions like “a better parent” or “a great parent.” Yet we know what’s really being asked for: Perfection!

Jesus said the kingdom is like a field with wheat and weeds. This analogy can be found in the arena of parenthood. Be as good as you can be, but don’t demand perfection – either of yourself or your children. And focus on the small things. Be content to be “good enough” without the burden of being perfect. And if you can, give thanks for your imperfections. They offer you the opportunity to grow.

*by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute*

## Car or Meal Talk

Let’s return to the idea of judging others. Jesus does not approve of us judging others, especially in matters of God’s kingdom. Talk about how easy it is to label others as either good or bad, and ask and discuss whether this is beneficial or harmful.

## One-Line Prayer

Dear God,  
Sow in our family the seeds of goodwill  
and generosity.  
Amen.