

Jesus, Lord of the fields and flowers,
care for us when others can't.

Jesus, Lord of abundance,
let us acknowledge your gracious presence.

When

by John O'Donnell

And when this ends, we will emerge, shyly
and then all at once, dazed, long-haired as
we embrace
loved ones the shadow spared, and weep
for those
it gathered in its shroud. A kind of rapture,
this longed-for
laying on of hands, high cries as we nuzzle,
leaning in
to kiss, and whisper that now things will be
different,
although a time will come when we'll forget
the curve's approaching wave, the hiss and
sigh
of ventilators, the crowded, makeshift
morgues;
a time when we may even miss the
old-world
arm's-length courtesy, small kindnesses left
on our doorsteps,
the drifting, idle days, and nights when we
flung open
all the windows to arias in the darkness,
our voices
reaching out, holding each other till this
passes.

Irish Times, April 18th, 2020

Sociable Weaver Bird

Ploceidae is a family of small passerine
birds, many of which are called weavers,
weaverbirds, weaver finches and bishops.
These names come from the nests of
intricately woven vegetation created
by birds in this family.

The Sociable Weaver Bird builds
large compound community nests,
a rarity among birds. These nests
are perhaps the most spectacular
structure built by any bird.



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Gathering Again
Gospel Text One

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Jesus, you gather your people to you; you are gentle with us as a mother with her children. You comfort us in our sorrow and bind up our wounds.

Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness, through your gentleness we find comfort in fear. Your warmth gives life to the dead.

In your mercy heal us in your love and in tenderness remake us.

In your compassion bring grace and forgiveness; for the beauty of heaven may your love prepare us.

Maryknoll Book of Prayer page 12

2. Gospel text: Mark 4:35-41

That day, when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the story again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society and world. Then some sharing.

NB Not a time for argument.

4. Background Notes for Mark 4:35-41

In the chapter leading up to this story in Mark, the Jewish elders are growing very hostile to Jesus, challenging him for usurping God's power, breaking the Sabbath Law. They even protested that his power to heal came from Satan (Beelzebub). And they have begun to meet with Herod's party (whom they despised) to make plans to kill Jesus.

In the mindset of people at that time a lake/sea always represented something to be afraid of, dangerous and evil. The freshwater Lake of Galilee in the North of the country was prone to storms and threatening clouds. The fishermen accompanying Jesus probably knew it was a bit too late to be crossing - darkness falls early. Also setting out for the other side is heading out of their comfort zone to a place that is gentile territory, unfamiliar, to be avoided. They had many reasons to be fearful. Mark describes Jesus in the back of the boat, asleep on a pillow, no fears about the journey and finally in control of the storm. He appears calm, cool and clear what he is about. The challenge to his disciples is to have faith in him, despite their fears.

Mark wrote his Gospel for Christians who were suffering persecution. In face of the threatening clouds all around them, the only response can be faith in God's love and power accompanying them in their trials.

The 'other side' was the eastern shore of the lake of Galilee where the people were different in language, culture and political status from the disciples and Jesus. It was the eastern border of the Roman Empire.

5. Reflection Questions for Mark 4:35-41

Some of these questions may be helpful

When you think of Covid 19, what words come to you?

What got you through?

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

Jesus, Lord of the sea and winds calm the storm when we are frightened.

Jesus, Lord of the loaves and fishes, be our food when we are hungry.

Jesus, Lord of the lambs and flocks, seek us when we are lost.

Jesus, Lord of signs and wonders show yourself when we have doubts.

Jesus, Lord of the blind and lame, take our hand when we grow weak.

5. Reflection Questions for Mark 2:1-12

Some of these questions may be helpful

The man's friends went out of their way to give him a chance of healing. Who has been doing this in our country with Covid?

When have you experienced a friend's kindness lifting you up?

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

God gives us the power
to create beauty
to make another smile
to be a healing presence
to console those in difficulty
to bring peace and joy to others
to help those in need
to laugh and enjoy life
to do good and turn from evil
to forgive anyone who has hurt us
and most of all, to love.

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Gathering Again
Gospel Text Two

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Gracious God, maker of the skies above,
lowly Christ, born amidst the growing
earth,
Spirit of life, wind over the flowing waters,
in earth, sea and sky,
you are there.
O hidden mystery,
sun behind all suns,
soul behind all souls,
in everything we touch,
in everyone we meet,
your presence is around us,
and we give you thanks.

But when we have not touched
but trampled you in creation,
when we have not met you in one another,
when we have not trusted
in your guiding, sheltering love for us
let us wake up to the way
you want us to live.

Iona Abbey Worship Book, page 51

2. Gospel text: Mark 2:1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come from home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the story again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society and world. Then some sharing.

NB Not a time for argument.

4. Background Notes for Mark 2:1-12

Jesus had gone from Nazareth to Capernaum, Peter's town, about 30 km from Nazareth at the top end of the Sea of Galilee. The houses were generally made of mud bricks, easily removed. Friends of the man managed to dig through the roof and lower him down in front

of Jesus. He lay there, full of pain, in rags, body falling apart.

People at that time took illness/disability as a sign of God punishing the person. Jesus confronted by the suffering man takes a stance he hasn't taken before. He is emboldened by the goodness, faith and courage of the man's friends. In response to their brave, caring gesture he declares the man's sins dismissed, wiped out, gone, and of no account. His action and words shocked everyone around him. In his milieu, to forgive sins was the prerogative of God. In Jesus' mind, however, God did not see the man as a terrible sinner, fit only to be discarded. Given the faith of man's friends, to Jesus it became as easy for the 'human one' (Son of man) to forgive sins in the name of God as to invite a person crushed by illness to stand and walk free again.

Jesus speaks out for justice and speaks in God's name, God who does not punish but desires life to flourish.

The religious leaders' reaction is in sharp contrast to the caring response of the man's friends. Jesus' confident pronouncement and healing flouts their jealously-held narrow understanding of 'divine' judgement. From this time on, they see Jesus as a threat to their power over people.

Decapolis: ten towns on eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee between Susita and Bethsaida.

caring relationships. It's having faith in ourselves, trusting that divine life is not separate from our own. And the parables are Jesus' way of assuring us that the kingdom is an ever-present, lasting reality. The reign of God is already here, but it is only a seed sown in the world. Despite all the resistance and failures God will bring to fruition the disappearance of evil, injustice and death.

(These notes on the kingdom are put together from Judy Cannato's 'Field of Compassion' and 'A Historical Approximation of Jesus' by Jose Pagola.)

5. Reflection Questions for Mark 4:26-34

Some of these questions may be helpful
Share some signs of hope and growth that have become clearer to you in 2020.
What depressing or false image of God did you get rid of? How? With what result?

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

Lord, may your light encircle us,
May your love enfold us.
May your peace encourage us.
May your hope fill our hearts.
May your presence, real presence enrich us
May we live out your dream for us in the weeks ahead.
As we gather may we have open hearts and open minds
Trusting the future to you, may we act with love, courage, respect and confidence.

Sociable Weaver Bird

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Gathering Again
Gospel Text Three

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Creator God, we thank you for this given day;
for your glory shining forth in sky and sea.
In the changing light on the hills
in the flight of birds,
in the flowers in meadows and garden.
We thank you for your love
experienced in our own lives
for new friends and old
for caring and conversation,
for community and solitude,
for work and play, for words and silence.
We thank you for this gift of time:
May your Spirit help us to use it creatively
in the name of Jesus whose joy is to be
with us.

This is the Day, Month 2, Day 6

2. Gospel text: Mark 4:26-34

He also said, "This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain - first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Again he said, "What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could

understand. He did not say anything to them without using parables. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the story again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society and world. Then some sharing.

NB Not a time for argument.

4. Background Notes for Mark 4:26-34

Given all the things that threaten seeds: birds, droughts, weeds, insects, parasites, pesticides, blight, the miracle is that anything survives. And it does.

The essence of both these parables is that the outcome is sure and goes beyond anything we might expect or hope for. And this is because the power, life/force at work is the power, life/force of God.

Every parable is a direct expression of Jesus' own experience of God. God is an immediate and familiar reality to Jesus, this reality he relays using striking but ordinary language. And the image of God is always one of faithful, unbelievable care and abundance. Also in every parable there is a paradox: The man works at scattering the seed but the growth is really the effortless natural growth of the seed and then the natural growth as it matures becomes the work of the human harvest.

Both parables declare the kingdom of God, present, alive and active. God's dream for people and the earth is coming true. But we need to SEE, LOOK, HEAR, ACT.

Jesus is inviting the people to move away from all the images and ideas about God that block their awareness of God's sustaining loving presence in everyday life. It's about walking with trust in God. And Jesus is asking people to have faith in him but also to have faith in themselves.

While the daily oppressive situation of his people made it hard to believe, the more they would free themselves to believe in God as loving, compassionate, advocating and acting on their behalf the more they would influence their lives and their community.

While Jesus is telling the parable, he is facing rejection by his family, he will be driven out of his own home town and hunted by authorities. The parables indicate his deep faith in God's presence with him throughout danger.

Kingdom of God: We never get a precise definition. It is intended to be a present reality, one experienced in the here and now, not in an other-worldly location at some other time. You yourselves are in it. 'It's in you and among you'.

The 'doing' of the kingdom, its manifestation here on earth, requires our active participation. It's about release and recovery, liberty from oppression and energy to change realities of diminish and disaster to places of flourishing. Love is at the heart of the kingdom of God - responsible and

7. Closing Prayer

Spirit of God, Holy God, Wind of God,
Fire of God, Life of God.
Anoint us to be people of your Good News,
yoked to break yokes,
sighted to bring sight, healed to be healers,
struggling to bring release.
Shower us and comfort us in the shining
light
and darkness of your glorious mystery.
We invoke your mystery - not ours.
We invoke your clarity, not ours.
We invoke your trust, not ours.

Spirit of God, - Holy God Wind of God,
Fire of God, Life of God -
who you made Deborah and Miriam
Mary and Ruth, Brigid and Cecelia,
Sojourner Truth and Rosa Parks,
cry out through the world, cry out through
us,
Make your justice, your work, and your
love, real through our lives.

Elizabeth Rice

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Gathering Again
Gospel Text Four

1. Welcome and opening prayer

May there be springs enough in your life
to outlast the winters.

May there be music enough
to lift your spirits when we need it.

May we be gentle enough
to comfort those who are hurting
but revolutionary enough
to bring heaven to those who need it now.

May there be occasions
to bring out laughter and dance
May we always celebrate
the abundance of God's love.

2. Gospel text: Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat
to the other side of the lake, a large crowd
gathered around him while he was by the
lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders,
named Jairus, came, and when he saw
Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded
earnestly with him, "My little daughter is
dying. Please come and put your hands on
her so that she will be healed and live." So
Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around
him. And a woman was there who had been
subject to bleeding for twelve years. She
had suffered a great deal under many
doctors and had spent all she had, yet
instead of getting better she grew worse.

When she heard about Jesus, she came up
behind him in the crowd and touched his

cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch
his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately
her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body
that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realised that power had gone
out from him. He turned around in the crowd
and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against you, his
disciples answered, "and yet you can ask,
'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had
done it. Then the woman, knowing what had
happened to her, came and fell at his feet
and, trembling with fear, told him the whole
truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith
has healed you. Go in peace. And be freed
from your suffering."

3. Quiet time...

*People can read over the story again and
pick out a word or short phrase that strikes
them and say it out loud. When everyone has
had a chance to speak, people can silently
listen to what God is saying to them in their
hearts linking it with themselves, their
community, society and world. Then
some sharing.*

NB Not a time for argument.

4. Background Notes for Mark 5:21-43

The woman has no name; she is status - less,
perpetually segregated, a victim of
exploitation. She is at the end of her tether
after 12 years searching for cures. She comes
up behind Jesus because she thought of

herself as unclean and therefore he would be
unclean coming near her. She is reduced to
poverty and has nothing left but her courage,
hope and faith. Jesus registers her touch,
feels power going through his bones and
attunes to the woman. Jesus takes nothing to
himself but refers directly to the faith and
courage of the woman who considered
herself a nobody. He names her faith as
something to be admired and through it as
having released the healing power of God
within them both. She comes forward and
publicly acknowledges her gratitude for the
healing.

Here Jesus is noticing and making public the
goodness/heroism he saw in people around
him. This was his habit of mind, his normal
outlook on life - to find and name and build
the sacred within others. He would be the
occasion for them to recognise themselves
and the sacredness at the core of their being
and to believe in it.

5. Reflection Questions for Mark 5:21-43

Some of these questions may be helpful

What do you admire about the woman?

During Covid have some ordinary things or
'ordinary' people come to mean more to you?

6. Prayers

*Mentioning people and situations we want to
pray for.*

demons represent Roman military power. Demon*possession represents a colonisation of the mind -the people's anguish over its subjection repressed and turning in on itself. The oppressed oppressing themselves.

The nation itself was living among the tombs of its own hopes and dreams. So this account can be read as Jesus' repudiation of the political and ideological authority of the Scribes and Romans and holding out hope that the people can return to freedom and peace.

5. Reflection Questions for Mark 5:1-20

Some of these questions may be helpful
How will Covid have changed us?
What are you grateful for?

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

"You are the salt of the earth."
Sprinkle us across our town, God,
across our world,
to bring the flavour of your Kingdom
wherever we go.

"You are the light of the world"
Uncover the radiance that is
within us, God,
to shine the truth of your love
wherever we go.

"let your light shine before others
that everyone we meet
may see in our lives kingdom buds
and give thanks, to you, God our Creator.

from Sam Hargreaves

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Gathering Again
Gospel Text Five

1. Welcome and opening prayer

We believe that behind the mist the sun waits, we believe that beyond the dark night, it is raining stars, we believe that this lost ship will reach port. We will not be robbed of hope, we will not be broken.

Our voices are filled to overflowing with the desire to sing, the desire to sing.

We believe in reason, not in the force of arms; we believe that peace will be sown throughout the earth, we believe in our nobility, created in the image of God and in our capacity to dream reaching for the skies.

We will not be robbed of hope.
We shall trust forever,
we shall trust forever.

From Chile

2. Gospel text: Mark 5:1-20

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name, don't torture me!"

And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion, "he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man - and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him go, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And the people were amazed.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the story again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently

listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society and world. Then some sharing.

NB Not a time for argument.

4. Background Notes for Mark 5:1-20

The Gerasenes: lived on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus here takes on the spirit of evil. Violence characterises the people's treatment of the man, the man's language is violent and his treatment of himself is harsh.

To name someone or some thing at that era was to have power over it but Jesus does not respond to the spirits' naming. In this way he threatens their power and now they are cowering, and begging to escape from him and enter the lowest of the low - inhabiting the pigs who rush into the depths of the lake where all hell and chaos belong. Jesus does not let violence or death have the last word. The confrontation is severe, the outcome is serene.

The villagers were afraid. Things were better (controllable?) when the demons knew their place. Their fear is the result of Jesus' truth, courage and goodness and they don't want to face the implications. The man, now in full senses, healed, remains there, a sign of what God is really like and the real potential of every human being if they trust God.

NB There is another political way of looking at Mark 5:1-20 proposed by Ched Myers, in 'Binding the Strong Man'.

He sees in the text overlays of the oppressive situation the people were under at the hands of the Romans: the name of the demons - 'legion' has military overtones; 'herd' can refer to military recruits; 'dismissed' echoes a military command, the