

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A

Isaiah 55:10-11
Romans 8:18-23
Matthew 13:1-23 or 13:1-9

GATHERING

(An unlit candle and a cornucopia of summer harvest vegetables and fruits are arranged on a table covered with a festive cloth.)

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. The leader calls members to be attentive to the presence of God within and among them. After a time of silence, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

All: You have visited the land and watered it;
greatly have you enriched it.
God's watercourses are filled;
you have prepared the grain.

Leader: The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

All: Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows,
breaking up its clods,
softening it with showers,
blessing its yield.

Leader: The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.

All: You have crowned the year with your bounty,
and your paths overflow with a rich harvest;
the untilled meadows overflow with it,
and rejoicing clothes the hills.

Leader: The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful
harvest.

All: The fields are garmented with flocks
and the valleys blanketed with grain.
They shout and sing for joy.

Leader: The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful
harvest.

Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14

(Members sing "Seed, Scattered and Sown," as found on Internet.)

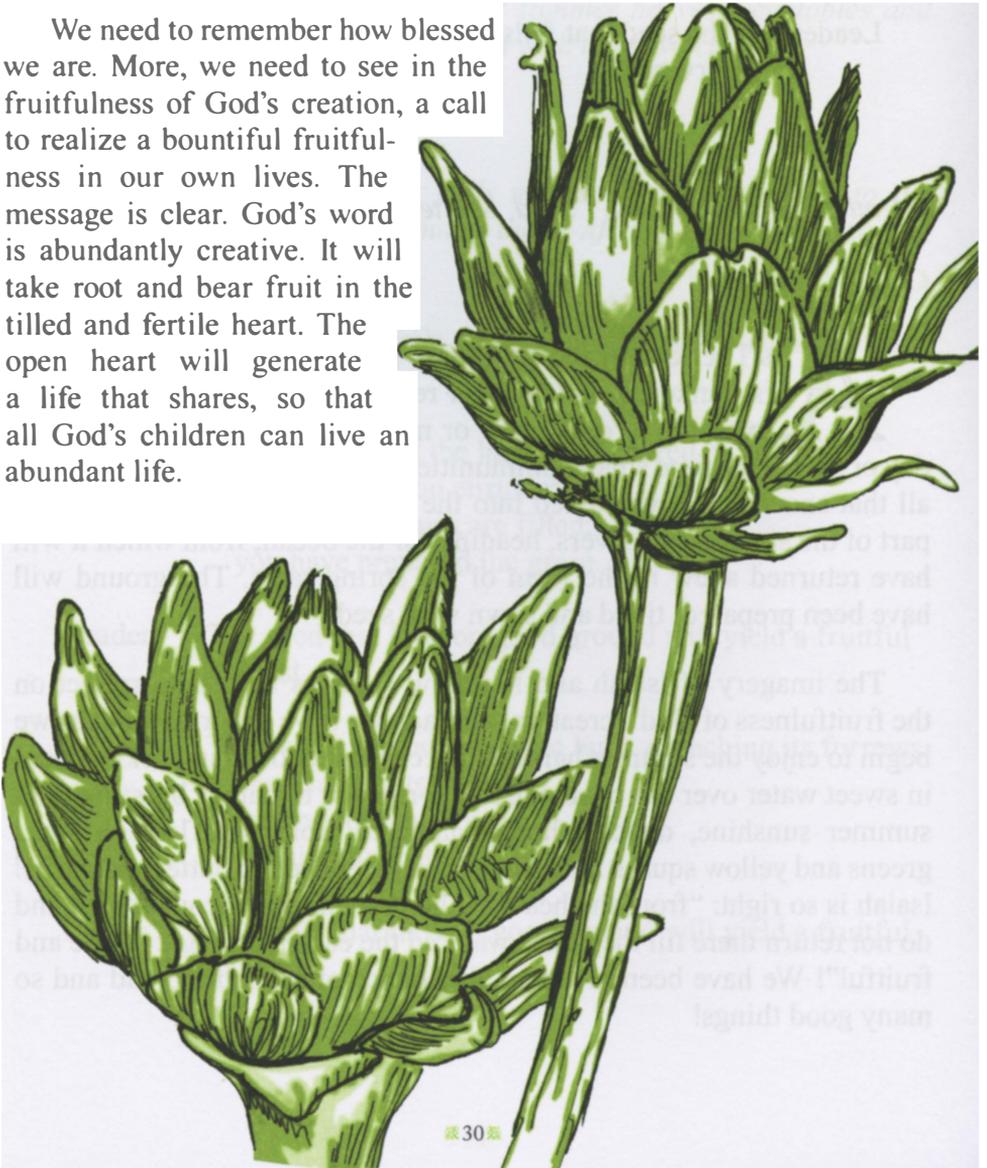
COMME TARY

As I reflect on the scriptures for this week, the entire state is hunkering down for a record breaking Nor'easter. It is expected to dump two or more feet of snow over the next day or so. By the time small communities gather around these scriptures all that snow will have passed into the ground. It will have become a part of the streams and rivers, heading for the ocean, from which it will have returned anew in the form of the spring rains. The ground will have been prepared, tilled and sown with seed.

The imagery of Isaiah and Matthew leads us further to reflect on the fruitfulness of God's creation. Already we have experienced it as we begin to enjoy the summer harvest: sweet corn, cooked in husks soaked in sweet water over hot charcoals, vine-ripened tomatoes bursting with summer sunshine, delicate honey gathered from wildflowers, bitter greens and yellow squash and green beans drenched in butter and garlic! Isaiah is so right: "from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth making it fertile and fruitful"! We have been given an abundance of seed and bread and so many good things!

Many of us never have to think beyond *what* I will have for my next meal. Far too many others wonder rather *whether* they have enough for a next meal. In this land of plenty, it is easy to forget that an estimated one out of 6 elderly people has an inadequate diet, or that in the U.S. hunger and race are related. 46% of African-American children are chronically hungry, as are 40% of Latino children, compared to 16% of white children. It is also the case that the infant mortality rate is closely linked to inadequate nutrition among pregnant women. Believe it or not, the U.S. ranks 23rd among industrial nations in infant mortality. One out of every 8 children under the age of 12 in the U.S. goes to bed hungry every night (ThinkQuest – Oracle Education Foundation).

We need to remember how blessed we are. More, we need to see in the fruitfulness of God's creation, a call to realize a bountiful fruitfulness in our own lives. The message is clear. God's word is abundantly creative. It will take root and bear fruit in the tilled and fertile heart. The open heart will generate a life that shares, so that all God's children can live an abundant life.



FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How do you express thanks for the blessings of your life?
- ◆ How has God's word found root and brought forth fruit in your life?
- ◆ How open and receptive are you to the movements of God's Spirit in your daily life?
- ◆ What might you be able to do to educate yourself and address the realities of hunger and malnutrition in your city or town?
- ◆ How might God be calling you to share something of the bounty of your life so that others may live an abundant life?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Make eating healthy a prayer. Incorporate as many fresh and healthy vegetables as possible into your diet! When you do eat fresh and healthy, thank God for the bounty of creation.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Re-read this week's gospel. Pray for an open, fertile heart, that God's word take deeper root in you and bear even richer fruit.
- ◆ Support local farming by going out of your way to purchase locally grown produce and dairy products.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the gospel of the week is re-read by a member of the community. Following the reading, the leader poses this question to the members: "What does Christ say to you/us in hearing this gospel today?" The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful attention to how Christ speaks to them in this gospel. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally.

(When the sharing is complete, three members of the community pray as follows on behalf of all.)

- I: Almighty God, You keep on giving abundance to us in the dew of heaven, and food out of the richness of the soil. We give thanks to Your most gracious majesty for the fruits of the field which we have gathered.
- II: We beg of You, in Your mercy, to bless our harvest, which we have received from Your generosity. Preserve it, and keep it from all harm.
- III: Grant, too, that all those whose desires You have filled with these good things may be happy in Your protection. May they praise Your mercies forever, and make use of the good things that do not last in such a way that they may not lose those goods that are everlasting. We pray through Christ, our Lord.
- All: Amen.

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(Members exchange a sign of peace.)