Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Dreamstime/Photowitch)



by Sr. Sarah Kohles

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

July 25, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Editor's note: *Welcome to Theologians' Corner, where each week a different woman theologian from around the world offers a fresh reflection on the Sunday readings.*



17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 26, 2024

In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus provides four images that help us reflect upon what the kingdom of heaven will be like. The fourth image at the end of the Gospel reading about the scribe and the storeroom is a useful place to begin.

The scribe who maintains the storeroom brings something old and something new out at the same time. This suggests that the kingdom of heaven will include something old, familiar, tried-and-true, as well as something that is new, fresh and perhaps even unfamiliar. Perhaps the old may be in continuity with the richness of Scripture and tradition in our faith. Perhaps the newness will include a fresh take on

something that has been right in front of us all the time, but that we've never seen. Perhaps it will include what it means to follow Christ into this kingdom of heaven more faithfully.

Let us try to embrace the challenge of reading the remainder of this familiar Gospel with fresh eyes.

If the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure in a field that you find, rebury, and hurry to purchase that field:

- What do you treasure above all things?
- Selling all you have is a drastic response. What would you sell everything for?
- What are you most passionate about?
- What gives your life meaning?
- What inspires you each day to give all you have?
- What gives you joy?

The second image is similar; a merchant, who is a person of business, searches for fine pearls and sells everything to buy the discovered exceptional pearl. This image also entails selling all one has. The treasure in the field may have been stumbled upon accidentally, though when discovered, the person then sold everything to acquire it. The difference here is that the merchant is searching for the pearl in this case. So, the kingdom of heaven may be found by accident or it may be the goal a person longs for.

- What are you searching for?
- What will you do when you find it?

It also seems impractical to chase after a fine pearl. What would the merchant do with it? Sell it again? Admire it? The merchant certainly cannot eat it. If the merchant is merely going to resell it, what was the point of attaining the pearl?

Advertisement

This story suggests it is profoundly impractical to chase after the kingdom of heaven. Something about this adventure searching for the kingdom of heaven doesn't entirely make sense. It is a reminder that God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are high above our thoughts, as Isaiah 55:8-9 reminds us.

It may mean that following God's ways does not make sense with what would be logical in the world. Yet, we may feel drawn to God's ways anyway. Perhaps the impracticality of what we are drawn to may be a sign that it is aligned with God's ways.

The third image of the kingdom of God is the only one that includes an explanation of the meaning. It is a net thrown into the sea that catches all kinds of fish, which will then be separated — the good from the bad. Thus an angel will separate the good from the bad at the end of the age. There will be suffering for the wicked who are cast away.

This is the hardest part of the reading. How do we read this part of the Gospel afresh? I confess I do not particularly like being compared to a fish, as even "good" fish stink. Also, the clear dichotomy between good versus bad is uncomfortable. For who is ever purely good or entirely bad?

What is clear is that it is not our job to do the sorting. It is not our task to determine which are good and which are bad. It's our role to be caught up within the net, collected for the kingdom of heaven.

- What would you want thrown out of your life?
- Do you have struggles, addictions, or patterns of behavior that you cannot seem to avoid?

Maybe we need the angel's help to see parts of our lives and behavior clearly.

- What suffering, what wailing and grinding of teeth would you like to leave behind?
- What help would you ask for in order to be ready for the kingdom of heaven?

Finally, returning to the scribe who brings forth the old and the new:

- What is old, familiar, and treasured that you want to keep in your life?
- What newness would you like to bring forth?

For whatever new goodness we imagine, God's imagination for us is far better than we could ask for or expect.

This story appears in the **Theologians' Corner** feature series. View the full series.