

A Proper 10 2026
Saint Barnabas Church, Falmouth MA
The Rev. David Rider
July 12, 2026

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-21

As we settle into the heart of summer, with the World Cup nearly behind us and Labor Day still beyond the horizon, we live into that part of the church year known as ordinary time

In the middle of summer, we relax a bit and reflect upon the Scriptures in new and refreshing ways

We hear the teaching and healing stories of Jesus' earthly ministry, the time during which the disciples and strangers alike came to know him as the Christ

Like rabbis who pour over the same Torah year after year, we bring our lives to familiar biblical passages and hope to glean new truths about God's will for us

Today and for the next two Sundays, we hear stories about the sowing of seeds and their connection to the Kingdom of God, apt images for the height of the growing season

Gathering today just a few minutes' walk to a beautiful beach, we can easily imagine ourselves amid the crowd listening to Jesus string together several parables

How do we become so rooted in God so that we do not shrivel up when life gets too hot?

How do we ground our faith in the soil of the Good News so that we are not blown around by the winds of popular opinion and ideology?

As we deepen our spiritual lives and our personal commitments, how do we discern the difference between fruitful soil and shifting sand?

Like summer gardens that grow slowly but surely when lovingly tended, Christian spiritual formation takes place over time, with tap roots that grow deeply into divine love with a bit of water and fertilizer in the form of a fruitful, eucharistic community

These images of sowing seeds, with which Jesus addresses the disciples, along with the call to tend the fragile garden, go back to the beginning of creation, where God gives Adam and Eve dominion over the earth, with a mandate to “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth in heaven, and every living thing that moves on the earth”

Throughout the biblical witness, God gives humanity an enormous mandate and incredible authority to till the garden, but there is one catch:

We don’t own it. We are simply its stewards, fully accountable to the creator and ruler of the universe

As stewards—call us spiritual ecologists, if you like—we develop skills to insure that our seeds will bear fruit, and yet that which we manage, the nature and cultural heritage of plan earth, belongs to another

Concurrently, we act as stewards of of creation care itself, working to identify and overcome the industrial and environmental forces that threaten this fragile earth, our island home

Matthew’s version of the Gospel consistently expects us to bear fruit—to be productive in service to God’s kingdom

So fruitfulness is not some gauzy metaphor for inspiration but a core mandate of discipleship as followers of Jesus

There are two great Latin phrases from classical theology that speak to the DNA we inherit for the task:

In the natural order of creation, we humans have a *sensus divinitatis*—a sense of divinity—along with a *semen religionis*—or the seed of religion

This *semen religionis*, this seed of God's presence within us, constitutes the very spiritual DNA that Jesus came to reclaim in his proclamation of God's Kingdom and our place within it

We bear the seed of God's divinity within us, and because of Christ's corrective action we are made righteous and freed to sprout that seed within the soil of God's Church

Planted in the fertile, nurturing soil of the Church, we develop our taproots to anchor us, and bear life-giving fruit as a gift to the world

When the Word of God is nourished in the soil of God's holy Church—when we are fed by the very body and blood of Christ—look out!

We can only react with joy and wonder when we tap into everything God has given us

We live no longer as shriveling violets, but rather we glorify God with a sense of thankful abundance

It is this very thankful abundance that should undergird everything we do in this parish and in our own lives

Lest we romanticize this gift too much, however, let's remember that the challenge befits the gift

The Church exists not so much in order that we feel good about ourselves, but so that we can complete the tasks that God has set before us: to proclaim the Good News, reconcile the world to Christ, bring new disciples to Christ, strive for justice and serve the needs of this world

Christ redeems our *semen religionis* by his own bloodshed from the Cross, and in the power of His resurrection, we are called to be strong, competent, joyful disciples in the Church and world

I have been thinking about this *sensus divinitatus* and *semen religionis* as I prepare mentally for a joint meeting with our search committee and vestry on Thursday, preceded by an important vestry meeting on Tuesday

Culturally speaking, how has this innate sense of God evolved during our lifetimes, amid changing demographics, cultural turbulence and the newest generations of adults springing up among us?

As I have delved into summer campus upgrades these past few weeks that help point us to the future, I am keenly aware that our campus and its many constituents will look dramatically different in ten years than it does today

Yes, we will continue a core group of parishioners who hold together our worship, pastoral care, education and outreach ministries

But your next rector likely will spend more than half of his or her workweek coordinating the ancillary groups that come onto our campus, a weekly participants that far outweigh that of Sunday morning

What kind of rector will thrive in this new environment that abounds with opportunity and risk—which personality types would thrive and which would be sucking wind?

How do we capture this *sensus divinitatus* in new ways while holding on to our core beliefs?

Do you know, for example, that by mid-August, our campus will host two worship services weekly and seven yoga groups weekly?

Do you know that we will likely host a relocating A.A. group on Friday evenings that includes 100-150 members, a number that far exceeds our average Sunday attendance?

How does God work on this campus, how do we sustain and grow the material assets needed to make it happen, and how should we envision the skill sets and life experience needed for a rector who can serve God at the center of a quickly changing ecosystem?

I am highly confident we will figure it out completely amid two hours of conversation on Thursday afternoon.

Your vestry and search committee are embarking on this journey, but I guarantee it will not be another business-as-usual recruitment, and thank God for that

We are not re-arranging the chairs on the Titanic

Instead, we are envisioning a bold new future that melds together wellness, human thriving and conflict, cultural joy and challenge in new ways

To channel the famous 1988 General Motors TV ad, "**This is not your father's Oldsmobile**"

I started out by naming my enjoyment of the ordinary time that summer provides

As you do so, contemplate the new heaven and earth that might unfold on this campus under the right kind of ordained and lay leadership

The old ways have passed away and would force the last one standing to turn out the lights

A new model can promise abundance of God's love in new forms, new ministries, and new risks that might transform this campus

As we allow ourselves to dream new dreams in a complicated world, we're also working intensively and faithfully to be followers of Jesus as we engage in ministry and proclaim God's profigate love toward you, me and tomorrow's stranger who walks onto this campus in search of meaning, healing and transformation.