

Opal's Story: (1) CTM STORIES // OPAL - YouTube (Part 1 only)

Jesus' missionary call begins by seeing the lost: 'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Mt 9:36-38 NIV)."' Some unknown missionaries saw the lost Thai people and went to tell the Good News. Opal's relationship with Jesus is a product of that call.

- Jesus 'saw the crowds' and then 'he had compassion on them.'
- Interestingly, Jesus says there are many people who want to believe, who are ready for faith, but there is no one to tell them.
- Therefore, we should pray for workers who are willing to dedicate their lives to the lost.

Today is the start of our mission's convention. Next week has been in the works for 5 years. Today, we look at the Bible passage for this year's theme.

Christ Among Us - I must admit, that when I first heard it, I thought, 'What?' But now I see its power:



- Just as Jesus lived among humankind and brought salvation by his death and resurrection, we do too.
- We are the body of Christ in this world. 'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1Co 12:27 NIV).' We are Jesus' hands, feet, and mouth.
- We are the fragrance of Christ in this world.

Before we look at the theme passage, let's look at one of Jesus' stories.

1. Wheat & Weeds, Mt 13:24-30.

'Here is another story Jesus told: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. ²⁶ When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. ²⁷ The farmer's workers went to him and said, 'Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?' ²⁸ 'An enemy has done this!' the farmer exclaimed. 'Should we pull out the weeds?' they asked. ²⁹ 'No,' he replied, 'you'll uproot the wheat if you do. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn (Mt 13:24-30 NLT)."'

The point of Jesus' story is that right now God's kingdom and the kingdom of this world are intermingled, growing together. This is one of the few parables that Jesus explains to his disciples – its meaning is clear.

Jesus' explanation ...

- Jesus = the farmer sowing good seed, v. 37.
- Field = the world, v. 38.
- Wheat = children of God's kingdom, v. 38.
- Weeds = children of the devil, v. 38.
- The enemy = the devil, v. 39.
- Harvest = the end of time, v. 39.
- Fire = judgment, vv. 40-42.
- Barn = life in God's eternal kingdom, v. 43.

This describes our current situation and our future. We are like wheat in a field mixed with weeds and someday there will be a harvest. If one tries to separate out of the world there would be damage to us Christians.

I grew up in DeKalb, IL, the home of seed corn. Since 1912, DeKalb Agriculture Research pioneered hybrid seed corn.¹ Some criticize hybridization as unnatural (genetically modified organics).²



- Hybrids are created when two healthy corn species are cross pollinated to develop deeper roots, be blight or drought resistance, or to stay green longer.
- Practically everyone in my high school detasseled corn at least one summer.

I bring this up because Jesus' illustration left out an important point for us today: the wheat can cross pollinate with the weeds, and the weeds can miraculously change into wheat. 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here (2Co 5:17 NIV)!' We cross-pollinate with our weed-like neighbors by living our lives as believers in this world and sharing our faith when we can.

- Separating Christians out of this world does not work, whether it was the ancient monastics, the Shakers, or the Christian communes of the Jesus People Movement. We are most spiritually healthy when we live among the weeds. It is our native soil; it is our purpose. We are to live among non-believers as influencers.

¹ [DeKalb Genetics Corporation - Wikipedia](#), accessed 11/1/23.

² Corn yields have gone from 30 bushels per acre before hybrid seeds to 130 bushels per acre currently. I have heard of some farmers getting 200 bushels per acre. [Corn Grain Yields, 1930 to Today | Corn Breeding: Lessons From the Past - passel \(unl.edu\)](#)

- Granted, we are not to be ‘polluted by the world (Ja 1:27),’ but for this cross-pollination to occur, we must live in a weedy world and be close enough to them to bring them the Good News.
- Remember, Jesus said, we are to be ‘salt of the earth (Mt 5:13).’ We are a change agent. Today’s word picture is that we are the fragrance of Christ in this world.

Let’s move onto the theme passage.

2. Christ Among Us, 2Co 2:14-17.

Paul has two different word pictures here, a triumphal procession and the aroma of life / death.

Because we are jumping in mid-thought here, let me add a little context. There are some super-apostles in Corinth (11:5, 12:11), and they look at Paul and see a loser. ‘Just look at how much he suffers (1Co 1:3-11). If God were really with him, he would not suffer.’

- But you cannot judge by exteriors because when we are weak, Christ in us is strong: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (2Co 12:9 NIV).’
- Things are not as they seem in the spiritual realm – victory sometimes looks like defeat. The grave seems final until the resurrection.

1. The first word picture is of a Roman victory parade.³ ‘But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere (2Co 2:14 NIV).’ Christ has triumphed and is now leading his captives in a parade.

- The conquering general is on a horse and leads the parade. His enemies, the defeated soldiers, are now his slaves who are being led to their death through the streets. Paul wrote, ‘I sometimes think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor’s parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world (1Co 4:9 NLT).’
- But notice that we are the ones who are being led as captives, ‘who leads us as captives (v. 14).’ We are the defeated soldiers walking to their death. Paul was defeated on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Where were you defeated? Where did you surrender your life to Jesus?
- Usually there is a cry of defeat as these men mourn their upcoming death: wailing, petitions for mercy, pleading for life. Instead of a cry of defeat, there is a cry of triumph.⁴ Paul says, ‘Thanks be to God (v. 14).’ As Jesus taught, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’²⁴ For whoever wants to save

³ There are four possible interpretations of this metaphor, this is the most likely. Second is a Greek coronation procession. See Paul Barnett, *NICNT 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 147-48, fn. 10.

⁴ E.g., Ex 32:18.

their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it (Lk 9:23-24 NIV).’ Thank God, we died to our old sin nature and now live a resurrected life!

2. The second word picture is of an Aroma, a fragrance, and a stench. ‘For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing (2Co 2:15 NIV).’ If your dog ever got sprayed by a skunk you know what a stench is. Sometimes opening the refrigerator door is dangerous.

But what about a good aroma or fragrance?

- Everyone loves the smell of a just bathed infant.
- Many are allergic these days to smells and so we can buy fragrance-free detergents.
- When I was a little boy, there was a fragrance that older ladies used to wear. I’d get within 5 feet of them, and the smell would go right to my brain. If they wanted a hug, I about died and had to somehow escape for fresh air.
- Psychologists tell us that smells recall memories powerful. For example, when I am in a dusty, oil-filled garage, the smell transports me back to the cemetery I worked as a teenager.

The connection point with Paul’s word picture is that fragrances spread even though you cannot see it.

- God leads us ...
- God spreads his knowledge ...
- Through us ... in every place, not just the easy places. We are the fragrance of Jesus’ grace in the world. He spread his sweet smell of grace through us.

Again, it is a victory in defeat. Think of the animal that Noah sacrificed after the flood: ‘The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “... never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done (Ge 8:21 NIV).”’

- The only time the word ‘aroma’ is used in the Bible is when it refers to God being pleased with a sacrifice: whether that is an animal sacrifice or a human giving their future for Jesus’ cause.
- It is Paul who wrote, ‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Ga 2:20 NIV).’ As our selfish, sinful selves are captured and put to death, there arises an aroma of new life and victory that spreads around us like a beautiful fragrance.
- We are Christ among the lost. Just as Jesus appeared defeated on the cross but was victorious in his resurrection, so too, as we identify with Jesus’ death and

resurrection we become Jesus' physical body here on earth. He works through us to bring the beautiful aroma of an unseen heaven to this rotting planet. We are the fragrance of Christ in this world.

But not everyone's spiritual noses will smell the beauty of grace: 'To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life (2Co 2:16 NIV).'

- As we live our lives in the harvest field, among the weeds, some will reject the Good News.
- They will see it as foolishness, to their spiritual noses we will smell like death. That is not a good smell. Once you have smelled death, you know immediately what it is.

The final verse states: 'Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God (2Co 2:17 NIV).'

- God help those ministries who are all about money.
- But the last sentence is interesting. 'We speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.' We live our lives before God; we are His ambassadors, sent especially here.

3. Buddhist & Hindu Priority.

We are called. Each one of us is called to directly influence our neighbors, to cross pollinate the Good News, to be a sweet fragrance. We are also called to support those who are called to go. We support them financially and with prayer.

- Today's bulletin contains a list of our missionary family for this next year. Please keep this list for prayer, but do not share it online. You could put dozens of lives in danger by carelessly stating someone is a missionary.
- CIC pledges to support these missionaries and then we ask a Faith Promise of you. We trust you to help us with our pledge to them. Our pledges are normally \$50 a month and a few are \$80 a month. Would you consider \$10 or \$20 a week to support one of our fine missionaries?

Here are two AG websites for prayer.

1. Pray for Muslims ...

- reachingmuslimpeoples.com
- Every Friday at noon, CIC's sanctuary. Every Friday a small group of us gather here in the Sanctuary to pray for Muslims. It is when Muslims pray, so we have chosen to pray for them. This website will



give you up to date prayer requests from our missionaries. I have been doing this Jumaa Prayer on and off since 1980.

2. Pray for Buddhists & Hindus ...

- changethemap.net This is a new prayer initiative from AGWM. You will find a lot of great information on the Buddhist and Hindu world.



Conclusion.

When I was called to a meeting in DC in September, I fully expected to hit up for more funds for this initiative to reach the Buddhists and Hindus. I was shocked when the new head of AGWM, John Easter, said, 'We are not going to ask you for money. Money is nice and if you want to give, we won't refuse. No. 'We want something more precious than your money; we want your children.' – John Easter, AGWM Executive Director I was shocked and thought of my two girls.

He explained that while we have a good number of missionaries to Latin America, Europe, Africa, and the Muslim world, we have far fewer missionaries to the Buddhist and Hindu countries. These countries are the most populated in the world. He said, 'we need God to call your children to these parts of the world; to give up their cushy American lives for the hopeless Buddhist or Hindu.'

- I remember the look on my parents' faces when I told them I was called to Asia. Their shock, pain, and then resignation (my parents were solid believers).
- Again, Jesus said: 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Mt 9:36-38 NIV).' Jesus' call for workers is fine in theory, but will you let your children go?
- Young person, are you willing to go if God calls you today?

Someone sacrificed to tell Opal. Opal's Story: (1) CTM STORIES // OPAL - YouTube (Part two)

Pray.