

**7 Pentecost  
July 19, 2020**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,  
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.  
AMEN**

Today we have another parable of Jesus. Now, parables are not intended to comfort us, but to challenge us and hopefully, change us. Parables speak out against the status quo, against our ways of thinking, our *provisional* ways of hearing God.

Last Sunday we heard the parable of the seed being sown on different kinds of soil and what the results were. More especially we considered the ways of THE SOWER. Now, today, we hear Jesus once again using a parable about seeds and farming to convey his message about God's kingdom. I think it is pretty interesting that he compares the Kingdom of Heaven to farming. The people he is speaking to would readily understand the image of a field, and they would grasp the difficulties in the battle between the good product, that is... the wheat, and the weeds which can spoil the harvest. And keep in mind that these weren't just any old weeds growing with the wheat. The original Greek identified them as DARNel, a weed that looks very much like a stalk of wheat as it is growing. The big difference is that the DARNel doesn't produce anything. So the only safe time to separate the weeds from the wheat *would* be at the harvest.

The point is that we are NOT to spend our time and energy trying to root out all of the perceived evils. Rather, we are to go about the work of God- in our own lives and within our communities. The real message of this parable is that WE must be sure that we are wheat and not weeds. We should be bearing the fruit of the Christian faith if we are indeed the seed which God has planted. If we can go about living lives without a judgmental spirit, perhaps we can thereby show to others just how much we realize that we ourselves have been forgiven. Where we are, and with what we have, we are to focus on sowing seeds of God's grace and God's peace rather than seeking to destroy some perceived enemy. Even in small ways, with small beginnings, we work the work God has given us to do. And like a small mustard seed or a pinch of yeast, mentioned further on in this Gospel of Matthew, our small beginning affects the whole, the end result, all of it.

One of the things that impresses me about the story of the work and ministry of the apostles, recorded in the book of Acts, is the way they went about their labors. Peter, James, John, and the others did not go around throwing over the statues of bronze and gold. Instead they went about showing people *Jesus*, telling the good news, and planting the seeds of the gospel in the hearts of people. Then they watched what God could do with such faithfulness. And, in the end, the fruits of their labors have stood the test of time.

In today's parable, Jesus uses the analogy of the field to represent the world, with God as the farmer, and the wheat and the weeds as humanity, in all its capacity for good and evil. Certainly, gardeners and farmers of all time understand the battle between the vegetables or the flowers- and the weeds which seem to have a mind of their own. So often, tearing up the weeds means tearing up the beans as well, or the flowers. How reluctant gardeners are to have just anyone help with the weeding, for fear that they may think something is a weed, when in fact it is the very thing the gardener is working

so hard to produce! Often it is just wiser to wait until the harvest when the differences become evident.

Who might be the weeds of today's Gospel account? Well, ... they could turn out to be US. To make the point, let us substitute people, to whom Jesus obviously refers, for the wheat or weeds in the parable. Where did these people come from? The shocked response of the servants who told their master that someone had planted weeds among the good seeds, brings to mind the self-righteous attitude of so many who are quick to point out the failings of others, eagerly offering to uproot them from the community of the "good" people...like themselves, of course. They express that tendency, which may be in all of us sometimes, to judge others...and express an unwillingness to accept the fact that we are TOGETHER ...both the good and the bad...in the field God has planted. It is more a failure of our ego needs than outright malice when we fail to understand that God's world is a mixed body of saints and sinners, wheat and weeds, together in the same field. The patience, forbearance, and tolerance of the prudent gardener are sorely lacking in so many people, including many Christians.

I was sent a little e-mail humor which said: A young man invited a friend to go to church with him. But the friend answered that he didn't want to go because the church is so full of hypocrites. "That's O.K." said the young man who had invited him. "There's always room for one more."

We must face the truth that we are *all* subject to falls, sometimes unexpectedly, and *no one* is immune from the weakness of human nature, from becoming the very weeds they deplore. Remember how St. Paul said "the good that I would, I do not...yet evil lies close at hand."

WE ARE LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHEN WE TRULY RESPECT THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND US. Many of you read the daily devotional Forward, Day By Day. Recently, there was a quote which said: "You can safely assume that you have created God in YOUR own image when it seems that he hates all the same people that you do." THE KINGDOM OF GOD EXISTS WHEN WE NO LONGER JUDGE OR BLAME. I truly believe this.

But obviously this would seem to point out a dilemma. What DO we do about serious wrongs? Remember the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover," no matter how attractive or how ugly it may appear. Even more seriously, we can not securely judge another as wheat or weeds when we consider that they too are created in the image and likeness of God, however distorted and out of place they may at times be. So often, even with the best of intentions, like the servants in today's Gospel, we judge by what we see, or what we hear. We find ourselves comparing others to ourselves, our culture, our values, our lifestyles. Jesus reminds us that any distinction to be made between the good and the bad...the weeds and the wheat...has to wait for the the Lord of the Harvest, the Divine Gardener who created the world and all that is in it...GOD ... who re, "declared that it was good." He is the farmer in today's Gospel who sows good seed. Then along comes humanity and some bad seed flowers. Who but the Holy Gardener really knows the difference between the good and the bad ones. Who but God truly knows the human heart? Who else but God truly knows the whole tapestry of a human life? Weeds after all, can appear as wheat. Wheat to the untrained eye may appear to be weeds. But, to the Divine Gardener, the whole picture/the whole story/the entire life, no matter how good or bad may appear to others, God knows.

In reality, we must rub shoulders with all sorts and conditions of people, with all types of people...and we *should* strive to see only the wheat...the good in others...for good is there, no matter how hidden.

We need to leave the weeds for God to deal with. Think of the irony that what may have started out as wheat could well be choked off by the weeds in the interesting twist that by judging others as unworthy weeds, we in effect are no better. If we have any goodness in us, it is only because of the grace of God, not because we are better, or he loves us more. If we truly are more the wheat than the weeds, we should praise God for the careful sowing and tilling of the good soil sustained through the breath of the Holy Spirit which nourishes the fledgling seed.

Remember the Prayer of St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace; where there is hatred, let ME sow love; where there is injury, let ME sow pardon; where there is doubt, let ME sow faith; where there is despair, let ME sow hope; where there is darkness, let ME sow light...and so on....

Separation of the weeds from the wheat is God's job, not ours. And it appears that God has a pretty high tolerance for imperfections. God is willing to allow a good many bad seeds to sprout among the good. And sometimes, especially if we have difficulty telling the difference between a potential gem of a flower and a weed which doesn't belong, as I do, we are the last ones to know the good from the bad.

This parable was told 2000 years ago, but it certainly applies to the world WE live in, the mixed quality of life in God's garden. God created the world and said, "That's good! That's very good." So, what's with all these weeds? Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people? Why do the wicked seem to flourish and prosper and some righteous people struggle from day to day? What are these weeds doing in here amongst the wheat? Did God plant them, or did the devil sneak in while God was asleep?

We can laugh at the farmer's claim that an enemy planted weeds in his field, but, it's not funny when the weeds spring up in OUR garden, is it? When cancer cells spread and good cells starve in the body,... when defenseless people are gunned down in a place where they were supposed to be safe from harm. Then we struggle. We want to know, "What's with these weeds, Lord? We thought you planted good seed here. What are we to do about the messy field? How can we sort it all out? What if the bad people win? What kind of way is this to run a farm? We want things to be neater, infinitely more predictable. We DON'T want to wait until the harvest. We want to know now. We would like things to be more orderly. But in the kingdom of God, it just doesn't work that way.

I am reminded of that with a little saying I have on the bathroom mirror: "Please be patient; God isn't finished with me yet." God is in charge of the garden, and GOD IS IN CHARGE about the weeds and the wheat. .... Speaking as one who hardly knows the difference between a morning glory and a pea vine, I am so glad that God spares us from making that decision.

It makes no sense whatever to complain that there are weeds among us. It is simply a part of life. As we pray "lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil" let us always remember that Jesus gave us this prayer precisely to remind us that we could so easily fall under the power of evil and be choked by the cares and temptations that this world sows.

Solzhenitsyn wrote "The line separating good from evil (the wheat and the weeds) passes through every human heart...AND, even in the best of hearts there remains an *un*-uprooted small corner of evil."

We must pray that we do not become the weeds in God's garden in our sometimes haste to judge others. Remember the Biblical wisdom: "Do not judge, lest you yourself are judged" and ..."Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the plank in your own eye?"

I would like to conclude with a paraphrase of a quote, I think from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one which I have shared with you before ..."There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill behooves the most of us to talk about the rest of us."

AMEN