

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
19 July 2020

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

For some crazy reason, the reading for today made me think of Cabbage, Chitlins, Fish, Blue Cheese, Vegamite, Marmade, and Stinky Tofu. By the end of this sermon I will tell you how the parable of the wheat and the Tares reminds me of these foods. First, let us get the parable in context.

You may remember that last week we began reading Jesus' parables of the Kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 13. In last week's parable Jesus told us about a farmer who sowed seeds in different soils. Some of the seeds produce fruit and others don't. This week Jesus tells us of a farmer who likewise sows good seed, but the emphasis this week is on the "enemy." The passage tells us that "while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away." When the seeds grew, the weeds grew right along with them. The slaves of the master then came and asked him if they should uproot the weeds, to which the Master replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

This is the second parable where Jesus gives his disciples his own interpretation. The Wheat seeds are the "Children of the Kingdom" and the Weed seeds are the "Children of Darkness." Jesus is the sower, the harvest is the end of times, and the reapers are the angels of God. I don't know about you, but the Master's answer bothers me. When I read this passage I feel like screaming, "What do you mean, 'Let both of them grow together?'" This is not fair! If you have ever wondered why there is evil in the world, this passage offers an answer. Evil is allowed to co-exist with the good until the end of days when God will judge the living and the dead.

Now, back to the fairness question. Shouldn't evil be uprooted immediately? Is it fair that "God makes the sun rise on the evil and the good alike, and sends rain on the just and the unjust alike," as the Old Testament and the book of Sirach tell us? God allows both the good and the evil to breathe the same air, enjoy the beauty of nature, and delight in his creation. We have to share the same towns, churches, schools, jobs, and amusement parks. We, who try so hard to be ethical, good, obedient, religious, charitable and patient have to live side by side with the sinful, the atheist, the perverted, and the selfish. It would be understandable if we demanded that weeds be uprooted and thrown out of our

churches, our towns, and maybe even our homes. Life would be better if it was just us: the good, the righteous, the ethical, the church-going...

My friends, if you are tempted to think that this parable is just about evil people in the world, or even just about the "Evil One", let me suggest that this parable is about much more. This parable is more about the behavior of the Master's servants than it is about the weeds. The Master's servants pretend that they know what is best. They want to uproot the evil, even if this means destroying the wheat. Wheat and weeds are almost indistinguishable when they are very young. If they had removed all the plants they would have caused irreparable damage, much more than the enemy. The servants would in fact have become worse than the Master's enemy. The servants, however, don't have any patience to wait until the weeds and the wheat have grown. They want to pass judgment about what is good and what is bad and they want to uproot the evil now, on their own time. They want what they want when they want it. In a way, this is very American. We hate waiting and having to postpone justice. We want to take matters into our own hands to obtain immediate results.

The Master, however, wants them to wait. In fact, judgment over evil is never part of the servants job description. It will be God who will be doing the sorting out, the separating, and the judging. Judging others is never our job. In fact Matthew is very clear that we are not to judge, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (7:1-2). According to Matthew, each of us is to remove the log from our eyes before we remove the speck of dust in our neighbor's eye.

I am very glad that we are not responsible for passing judgment and separating the Wheat from the Tares. I am glad because when you look at a Wheat field, sometimes all you see is weeds. But, if you look at the field again from another angle, all you see is wheat. The sunlight, the wind, the distance from the object often play tricks on us and it is virtually impossible to distinguish the wheat from the tares when they are young plants. It is likewise with us. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the wheat from the tares among us. That evil boss who yells at you and is overly critical of your work is also a beloved father and grandfather, considered by his church as a valuable member and a precious wheat. Whether he is seen as a wheat or a tare depends on the angle, the setting, the circumstance. This applies to all of us as well. We are all "Saints and Sinners" at the same time. There are times we are the wheat and there are times we are tares. If judgement were to be passed today, I don't know how many of us would make it to the good side. This is the point of the parable. It is not our job to judge and separate.

Now, every parable has limitations and this one is no exception. People are not wheat or tares. It is not as easy or clear as that. Tares can not change into wheat and wheat can not change into tares. People, on the other hand, have the potential to change,

to accept the saving help of their Messiah, to welcome the Holy Spirit into their lives and engage in amendment of time. Perhaps the secret message of the parable is that the Sower, Jesus himself, has the power to change tares into wheat, and it is for this reason that the judgement must wait to the end of days. God will offer the world every day, hour, minute or second they need to come into a full knowledge and acceptance of his Son, the Savior of the World. All judgement before the end of days is premature and unfair. We must be patient. God will sort it all out in due time!

God is eternally merciful and eternally gracious. Despite my self-righteousness, I know that I am just as much a sinner as anyone else here or out there in the “world.” All sin deserves punishment and banishment from God's presence, as all sin is offensive to God. God is merciful, however. At the right time, he sent his only Son to us. We are forgiven, we are loved, and we are restored to a proper relationship with God. Today's Gospel is good news for all of us. God invites all of us to return to him. He is incredibly gentle and patient and he longs to have a relationship with each of us.

Now, let me go back to Cabbage, Chitlins, Fish, Blue Cheese, Vegamite, Marmade, and Stinky Tofu. Each one of these foods can be described as pungent, smelly, un-appealing, even undesirable. Yet, the beauty of cooking is that we often combine the pungent and the sweet, the malodorous and the fragrant, the acidic and the non-acidic into wonderful stews, delectable entrees, and amazing souses. It is likewise with us. There are times when we are the sweet ingredient and there are times when we are the stinky tofu. Yet, God uses all of us good and not-so good alike for his purposes. Let us, therefore, not be too dismissive of those we don't agree with or those we believe are not as good as we are. God has a plan for all of us and there is place for all of us in his kingdom.

May our Lord continue to bless you, Amen!