

Seventh Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): "Wheat and Cheat, Patience and Judgment"  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43  
July 18-19, 2020  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

The last thing any of us is thinking about in the middle of July is an ice storm. But I have a story to share about a winter years ago when we had a doozy of an ice storm, the kind that bends birch tree trunks down to the ground. The shrubs in front of the parsonage were covered with  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of ice and I was afraid the weight would break the branches. So I decided to use the edge of the shovel to crack the ice and free the branches. You won't be surprised to hear that what I succeeded in doing was **breaking** a couple of the branches. Life lesson: let the sun melt the ice gently, in Mother Nature's good time. Be patient.

The parable Jesus tells in today's Gospel teaches a **faith** lesson: be patient. Trust that in **God's** good time, God's purposes **will** be worked out and the Kingdom will come. In this moment, good and evil coexist side by side in the world. But be patient: when harvest time comes, everything will be sorted out.

The wisdom of patience is driven home by the **kind** of weed Jesus describes in his storytelling. He chose poisonous bearded darnel, also called "cheat," a wheat look-alike early on in the growing season, until the wheat develops kernels and the darnel doesn't. Growing side by side, the roots of the wheat and the cheat intertwine so that you can't pull out one without uprooting the other. This is why the landowner in the story tells his workers to let them be until the harvest.

There's a lot of "us" and "them" going on in the world today, a lot of demonizing the opposition. But when I point one finger at you, I've got three pointing back at me. I read something helpful lately. It was advice that each one of us acknowledge: a) we're not as

right as we think, and b) the other guy isn't as wrong as we think. And that moves us onto the second theme of this parable: judgment. We are to remember 2 things: #1: we should not judge others. #2: we ourselves will be judged – by God.

Mother Teresa once said, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." C.S. Lewis suggested that if we pretend to love the people we dislike, we'll eventually **find** ourselves loving them. When I'm struggling with my relationship with someone I find particularly trying, and take that frustration to prayer, I've heard the Lord say, "That's funny: he's one of My favorites." "That's funny: she's one of My favorites." That holy perspective presses the reset button of my thinking, making me realize that I've been thinking harshly of someone for whom Christ died. That I don't have a corner on the market of the Lord's affection. That God isn't going to pile on as I criticize any of God's children.

I've quoted Mother Teresa and C.S. Lewis, so why not Johnny Carson ☺? He once said, "Choose your enemies carefully because you become like them." Carl Jung says it's the things we quietly despise and reject in ourselves that we split off and project onto other people. Why do some of the character flaws we see in others bother us more than others? Maybe it's because they hit closer to home, in one way or another. If it **really** bothers me that somebody else is impatient, stingy, too talkative, catty, self-absorbed, bossy, maybe I'm seeing a reflection of something I see and dislike inside myself... "We have met the enemy and he is us."

We want to avoid the pitfall of pigeonholing people into being either weeds or wheat. People are not weeds. And even if they were, God's grace could transform those weeds into wheat. Look at Peter. He was headstrong, a poster child for "open mouth,

insert foot.” When the heat was on, Peter denied knowing his Lord. But Jesus didn’t weed him out of the inner circle. Peter grew into his role as leader of the early church. None of us is perfect: but regardless the Lord chooses to call and use us. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7:

*...[W]e have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.*

Members of our own Holy Trinity community have shared faith stories of how they were once deadened by addiction, illness, anger, bitterness, anxiety, fear, and how they’ve experienced a resurrection from the dead while they live. They might say the weed-filled, abandoned lot of their life has become a flowering garden. They thank God for patience and healing from on high. We thank God on their behalf and on our own.

The good counsel that we should suspend judgment until we’ve walked a mile in someone else’s moccasins is a reminder that our vantage point on someone else’s life is severely limited. Our line of sight is not clear. We can **never** see the **whole** of what anyone else has suffered through in the past or is dealing with in the present. So we rely on **God’s** view of the person, and we hear God say, “He’s one of My favorites.” “She’s one of My favorites.”

What you consider a weed I may consider a wildflower, anyway. It almost hurt my heart when we’d be in the Glacier Peak Wilderness of the Northern Cascades in Washington State, and see signs urging hikers to uproot ox-eye daisies, pack them out, and burn them. In Washington they’re an invasive species. In New Jersey we buy them at the garden center! How ‘bout dandelions? Remember picking them, tying together the stems and making necklaces of yellow dandelion flowers when we were kids? Or the joy of filling our lungs with the biggest breath we could and blowing a skedillion seeds from a dandelion

puff from here to kingdom come?? (To the chagrin of my Dad who'd spend entire Saturday mornings digging dandelions out of the lawn! Once I became the weeder, I probably didn't mess with dandelion puffs anymore!) Or bindweed, that tiny version of a morning glory vine that winds around and around and around any straight-standing stem in the garden? One person's weed is another person's joy. So we pray for discernment: that we see through God's generous eyes, the eyes of grace, that we be quicker to embrace than to reject, to support than to judge, that we exercise divine patience in humanly trying situations, that we not brand as "weed" what God calls "wheat."

The parable of wheat and "cheat" reminds us of Jesus' wisdom from the Sermon on the Mount, that **we should judge not**, lest we be judged (Matthew 7:1). It also reminds us that in the end **we will be judged** by our God. Part of that judgment will be based on what we did when we saw evil. Scripture is clear that we may **not** be passive in the face of others' suffering. Holy patience is different than unholy passivity. Love of neighbor requires an intolerance for injustice. A topic for another day, but just sayin' ....

We who freely acknowledge that we are saints and sinners at the same time boldly echo the *Celebrate* intro to today's lessons:

Having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly place our hope in the promises of God, and from [worship] we go forth to bear the fruit of justice and mercy.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham