

WELCOME 12 August 2018 – 12 Pentecost '18 B

Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

Speech codes, Censorship, de-platforming, book burning, persecution, purges, ethnic cleansing, genocide, war...That's how the world treats those with whom they disagree...the world's solution to what it sees as evil/opposition.

Or there's Jesus: *Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, & burn them, & to put the wheat in the barn...*

Jesus was a master at contrast. He told common stories about everyday subjects & mundane experiences to share the deep truth about his loving Father God that radically contrasted with people's expectations & understanding.

This week...the Parable of the Weeds...In a field sown with wheat an enemy has sown weeds. What do you do?

Jesus says, "Be patient until the harvest. Grubbing around in the field will damage the crop." The important thing for Jesus...protect & preserve the wheat.

Here's the deal...The human heart is a tricky place & only God can sort out his from those who belong to the evil one. So we suffer evil. We stand against it where it is seen clearly by standing in absolute contrast to it as children of the kingdom of grace & life & light...but we know it also lies hidden w/in our own hearts at times. So we pray for God to do the sowing & tending & at the last gather us to himself once & for all...Where we rest on this promise: *"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom."*

We'll explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father you alone are our source of strength & hope. By your promises today, replenish our faith & restore our trust to the full. Grow your Word in our hearts & your light in our lives until everyone we know knows you as the reason for our joy. In Jesus' Name...Amen.

12 PENTECOST '18 B – CONTRAST – PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

FAITH CHAT: 1. Is there somewhere in your house that needs “de-cluttering?”
2. When facing a problem, are you a “fix it now” or “wait & see” person?

‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ (ESV)

You know you’ve asked that question...maybe not those words, but you know you’ve seen headline after headline news report after news report & looked up in perplexity: “God are you gonna do something here?” An airliner lost at the bottom of the ocean, victims of racial oppression now considering stealing land from its racial minority owners, after the death of a loved one, a devastating illness, or lingering personal tragedy you lie in bed...“God if you are good/loving, why this?” *‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’ (NLT) How? Why? What to deserve?*

You see...as much as we like calling ourselves “Christian”...we often live as practical Hindus We live for karma. What goes around comes around. Do good, & good comes back to you Work hard/live honestly/keep your nose clean & things will work out your way...practical Hindus. The servants in the parable Jesus tells live with that illusion. That their good Master who has sowed good seed should not have weeds out the wazoo. Their karma got a flat tire. This isn’t supposed to happen.

I suspect for most of us, surely for those servants who had a hand in the sowing of that field & whose livelihoods depend on their Master being successful/prosperous, the logical next step is find out who did it & bring down the house on that scoundrel. Revenge, retribution or at least a \$\$ settlement. What happened? Who’s to blame? Hold them accountable. That’s what we’d do. Jesus has another idea...“*An enemy has done this.*” Nothing more. There’s no find him...expose him...punish him...nothing.

Not to be left hanging the servants have Plan B: “*Should we pull out the weeds?*” Again Jesus’ parable offers a frustrating response: “*No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, & burn them, & to put the wheat in the barn.’*”

First & foremost...this parable just trumpets grace & the final triumph of God’s rule by grace...Do not get lost in the very narrow focus on judgment. This is a parable of grace grace & nothing but grace...I know this how? 1. Weeds are not a hindrance to the harvest “*Let both grow together until the harvest...*” As troublesome as evil is in this world, as vexing as the “Why does a good God allow such rotten garbage to persist?” is: Evil in the long run is powerless against the children of the kingdom. Ultimately the Master’s design proves stronger truer more durable... Evil will not ultimately win. “*Here on earth you will have many trials & sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*” – Jn 16:33 Is 54:17 - *No weapon turned against you will succeed. You will silence every voice raised up to accuse you. This is the inheritance of the Lord’s servants. “Their victory comes from me,” declares the Lord.*

Jesus/the Master isn’t unaware of - oblivious to - apathetic about evil/pain/turmoil of this world. He’s well informed about its origin & its destructive purpose. He lived it. He suffered it. It killed him. He rose in victory over it. Therefore, because of his triumph: Evil is no threat to the wheat. Weeds are not a hindrance to the harvest

Mt 10:28 - “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul & body in hell.” Ok...evil might kill you. People of horrific intent might snuff your life out here on this earth. Drunk driver drive-by shooter bush fire plane crash earthquake slip in your bath tub...News flash: we all die anyway. Don’t be afraid of that. Don’t rush headlong into it. Don’t embrace death as your friend...it is the “*last enemy to be destroyed.*” Death is a mighty enemy but it is a defeated enemy. Hold on tightly to the promises...Which ones? How about these?

Jn 10:27ff – “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, & they follow me. I give them eternal life, & they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, & he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand. The Father & I are one.” No one can snatch them (me) from the Father’s hand

Rom 8:31-39 - If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us & was raised to life for us, & he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us...I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow — not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Is 49:23b – “...I am the Lord. Those who trust in me will never be put to shame.” Evil in the long run is powerless against the children of the kingdom. Ultimately the Master’s design proves stronger truer more durable...Evil will not ultimately win.

In fact...the only power evil really has in this world is to enlist you on its side. Evil can either get you to believe that God is powerless to help you – that your circumstances are so intractable that God can’t help & it’s on you to fix it – God doesn’t care enough or isn’t strong enough to help & you are stuck. The hole you’re in is your hole & you’re just going to have to make it the nicest hole possible.

Evil can only get you to doubt God's care for you & His capacity to bless you bring good/grace to you OR evil can tempt you to adopt its strategies & strongarm tactics to accomplish what you want done to fix what you see is broken. So in the parable given Jesus' assurance that the weeds are not a hindrance to the harvest, the only question is 2. Whose remedy to evil are you going to pursue? *"His workers asked him, 'Do you want us to pull out the weeds?' Well Master...if you won't fix this, by jingo we will! Grab the roundup & grubbing hoe boys! We'll get those weeds!"*

But the Master is quick to intervene & introduce his helpers to "the law of unintended consequences." You know what that is...on the ladder cutting the limb off the tree...limb breaks free before you get all the way through & the arc of its swing knocks the ladder out from under you. Drone fires the missile at the enemy General & it blows his wife up too Master says...that type of weeds looks a lot like the wheat $\frac{3}{4}$ the heads form...hard to know the difference & the roots kind all mingle together underground...Pull one you'll get both...you'll get both $\frac{w}{o}$ meaning too...With the best of intentions you'll still get it wrong...To stamp out drive out wipe out the one, you'll surely get the other as collateral damage.

Speech codes, Censorship, de-platforming, book burning, persecution, purges, ethnic cleansing, genocide, war...In my 56 years of living I've lived in the midst of War on poverty war on drugs war on terror & we seem to have more of each of them now than before we declared "war" & none of our efforts seem to have eliminated the "evil" on which we declared "war"...In fact, calling it "war" tells me we're never going to win because in every case the unintended consequences are equally devastating.

With the best of intentions you'll still get it wrong...CS Lewis understood: "Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive...It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his greediness may at some point be satisfied; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience." Best intentions still get it wrong

The Master's plan? *Let both grow together until the harvest. Let...permit...allow...leave...or if you've got some old translations...suffer. But the Greek word there is the key: Aphete ...156 times some form of that word appears in the NT. 52 of those times it is rendered with some form of "leave/let/allow/permit." But 47 times it is translated "forgive." What did the Master just say? Forgive the weeds? Yes he did. The malice, the evil, the badness in the world is not going to be driven to extinction by attacking & smiting & blasting the things or places or people where it resides.*

It can only be dealt with by letting it be...suffering...forgiving. Seriously Jesus? Seems so...You see...there was this one night where Jesus had a choice just like this one. He was staring evil right in the eye & his helpers pulled out their tools to fight off the weeds, but Jesus said, *"Put away your sword...Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for 12 legions of angels to protect us, & he would send them instantly?"* A while later that night he drove home his point: *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."* When he could choose either 12 legions of angels or a cross Jesus chose the cross.

On the cross Jesus doesn't threaten his enemies, he forgives them. And with the resurrection God proves that Jesus was right all along...Only grace ultimately wins. Why are there weeds? Why doesn't God just weedwhack them good & proper? Parable doesn't say & when he's asked for his opinion, Jesus decides he'd rather hang on the cross than get into the extermination business.

When we are honest with ourselves, we know Paul was spot on, *"I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I don't want to do."* (Rom 7:19) The field we live in is not so neatly divided as we would wish between weeds & wheat...sometimes the weeds are right here...but it will not always be that way. *The Son of Man will send his angels, & they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin...Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom.* What was Paul's assurance? *Php 1:6 - And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns*

According to Jesus, you already his good seed/people of the kingdom/wheat sown into this world. You already are the presence of God's kingdom of grace mixed into the brokenness & evil of this world. The kingdom is not about expectations to live up to, but the reality we live...right now...every day. Our call right here & right now is to trust that God will in God's way in God's time bring us to the fullness of his kingdom where all things evil hurtful broken are no more & *"there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."*

And until that is accomplished...to live our wheat-i-ness everywhere we are...to be living examples of trust in God's ultimate triumph...to be living witnesses to the power of mercy & forgiveness & self-giving love...to see/know evil for what it is & live the kingdom of love even surrounded by the work of the enemy because Ultimately the Master's design proves stronger truer more durable & will triumph & last forever. Let's pray with that in mind:

Father God we are yours and yours alone. Grow us until the day of harvest when we are completely in your presence and experience only love and life and joy with you. Until that day, give us the presence and power of your Spirit to reveal in everything we do, the life and victory of your Son Jesus. We pray in his name...Amen.