

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple
Sunday, July 19, 2020

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Jesus put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he 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,’”

Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” Jesus answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, Let anyone with ears listen!

Whether you are a backyard gardener, or a farmer, professional, you know the nuisance of weeds. This week I was standing in one of your backyards, at a sacred distance, and I learned about a weed grass that has thorny spikes that prick your fingers as you reach to extract its roots. Weeds take over, spreading quickly like the bamboo in my backyard. Farmers have been dealing with weeds forever.

Seminary professor, Elisabeth Johnson, says a botany lesson helps us to understand this parable. A noxious weed which grows plentifully in Israel is called darnel - these are the tares, or weeds. To an untrained eye, darnel looks like wheat as it grows and only at maturity do you know the difference between darnel and wheat. As wheat ears ripen, they are heavy and droop. Darnel ears stand straight up. Only at the harvest is the good seed most obvious.

In this parable, the evil one, and impact from the evil one’s seed, and God’s ultimate judgment feature prominently. The master plants seeds. The evil one comes along at night and sews weeds. Soon, wheat and weeds grow together. The slaves want to know if the master

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wants them to pull the weeds - to make it right, so to speak. The master says, "No. Let them grow together." Tearing out the weeds now could harm the wheat. The master says, "We will deal with these weeds at harvest time."

Attracted to Christ, thinking and trusting that he could be the promised Messiah, the disciples followed Jesus. Sometimes I think about those early disciples - why did they follow? What was it that had them leave their jobs? What was it that allowed them to risk a sense of security to follow this man, Jesus, whose actions were radical, caused conflict, and not particularly welcome by the systems in power? What did they think when he told his parables like this one? Whatever they thought, this is what they saw.

Where there was hunger, he brought bread and fish.

Where there was pain, he brought healing.

Where there was injustice, he brought merciful action.

Two chapters later in Matthew, Peter challenges Jesus about the things that defile humanity. He presses Jesus to explain, again, "What does this mean?" Peter pleads with the Lord for understanding. And Jesus says - "it's not what you say with your mouth, it's what comes out of the heart that defiles. Evil intentions, theft, false witness, slander"¹ Jesus explains to Peter that these things untethered in our hearts leads to evil. Jesus' answer then demands we examine our hearts today.

When we are around the energy of God's love in Christ - it is palpable. I suspect it was then, as it is now. It's an energy that is bigger than evil because it is God's power at work in the world. And God's power is always grounded in loving kindness.

These disciples needed help understanding the details of the parable of the wheat and the weeds - so they ask Jesus, their teacher, "Could you explain this?"

The slaves of the master ask, "Did you not sew good seed?" And the master responds, "An enemy has done this."

The slaves of the master ask, "Do you want us to fix it?" And the master responds, "No. Let them grow together."

Jesus leaves the nuance of the parable for us. In the Summer, in the growing season, in the days when we are thriving, the good and the bad are sometimes had to delineate. At the harvest, the truth is made clear.

We marry and bury in the church. Those services of worship are full of joy for those being married, and point to God's good gifts at work for those being buried.

In *Accompany Them With Singing*, theologian Tom Long says, "the fact is that people die pretty much as they have lived. ... a person who blesses the world at death has not learned this in the last few hours of life, but has been shaped to live a life of blessings ... the best preparation for dying a Christian death, then, is living a Christian life."

¹ Matthew 15:19

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In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches his disciples to “love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven who makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” God deals with evil. Let God be the judge.²

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus predicts to his disciples that “one’s enemies will be members of one’s own household.” He encourages his disciples to find the whole of their lives in him, and his ways of overflowing love, which could mean to lose the sense of control and the ability to judge others. God deals with evil. Let God be the judge.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches his disciples about God’s judgment in the story of the sheep and the goats. When the goats ask, but ... when - when did we see you hungry but not give you food? Jesus answers, “Just as you did not do it (care for) to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. These unkind, those who did not take appropriate actions, will go away into eternal punishment. God deals with evil. Let God be the judge.

Jesus says it clearly - our job is to “let them, the good and the bad, grow together” and entrust our lives to one who deals with the evil, and who is the judge. Examining our hearts, living a good Christian life, and not judging does not mean a life of inaction, but it is a clarion call to a life lived in fierce loving kindness.

These days we are being called to live this Christian life with resilience. Dr. Lucy Hone, directs an Institute for Well Being and Resilience. Her research names that the suffering and adversity that evil brings does not discriminate. A gift of living a good Christian Life is the truth that bad things do happen to good people.

In a TedTalk she identifies three skills for making resilient people.

1. Resilient people recognize that adversity happens. The tragedy is that the world we live in seems to project perfection and happiness.
2. Resilient people choose where to focus their attention. They learn how to tune into the good, humans are hard-wired for negative emotions.
3. Resilient people ask themselves as they navigate each day, is what I’m doing helping me or harming me?

John Lewis, an icon of Civil Rights who died yesterday said in an interview, “I’ve said to students, ‘When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have a moral obligation to do something, to say something, or to go get into ‘good trouble.’”³ John Lewis was a resilient leader.

With evil’s roar of discrimination, white supremacy and overt racism, as a young man - John Lewis used the whole of his life as a resilient witness to Christ’s loving kindness. He lived together in the presence of good and evil, as we all do.

² Matthew 5:43-48

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/17/politics/john-lewis-dead-at-80/index.html>

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The now is urgent - as Jesus says, "anyone with ears, listen." When we see something that is not right, not fair, not just, we have a moral obligation to do something, to say something.

What are we doing?

What are we saying?

How are our hearts?

How are we living a good, Christian life?

Those are the questions, aren't they?