

Lectionary 16 proper 11 A 17

July 23, 2017

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

As Pastor Jasmine said last week, we are in not only the season of Pentecost, we are in the season of parables. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus uses parables as a way to speak about what the Kingdom of heaven, the realm of God is like.

Parables do that, they are metaphors drawn out of common life, bringing both familiarity along with a slight twist which causes us to think differently about the world, but do not offer us explanations or definitions. Yet we like and desire explanations of things we do not totally understand.

For me parables offer us a glimpse so we might see the world as Jesus sees it, to help us to understand not everything happens because God wills it, but because evil exists in the world. Yet ultimately God reigns and God will judge with the evil in the world which God created for good.

Jesus explaining the parable of the weeds and the wheat to his disciples tells us as much. The field is the world, created and intended for good. The good seed are the children of God sown in the world by the Son of Man. It is the evil one who comes and sows the bad seed, the children of the age, or in the words of Paul those who live by the flesh. Then at the end of the age it will be the reapers, God's angels who will come to pluck out the bad seed, to gather the evil and all the causes of sin. Then will come and welcome the good seed, the children of God so they might shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

This is all well and good, but what do we who are living in the world do in the mean time? This is where we find ourselves within the parable in the servants of the master. Knowing the master has not only sown good seed,

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but had taken time to prepare the soil, so that everything might turn out perfectly.

But we all know that things do not always happen as we planned. Since we moved to Platteville, we have had only a couple of small flower gardens. At our home in Minnesota we had a large sunny backyard and I tilled up an area for a small vegetable garden with peas and beans, onions and potatoes and tomatoes. I know many of you have gardens and understand in those first couple of weeks as all the plants start breaking through the ground it is hard to tell the weeds from the vegetables you planted. So be patient, let them grow until you can determine which is which.

Debbie will tell you that she knows little about growing a garden but she wanted it to be weed free and beautiful. So the first couple of years she hurried out to get rid of the weeds. So first I had to slow her down and get her to allow things to come up so we could determine which was which then to help her to know the difference. Over the years she got better at waiting and in knowing what to leave and what to pluck up. She also got better at having a slightly less perfect garden and leaving me to take care of it.

But that is what we do so often when things do not meet our standards, when things do not go the way we want them to go. We want two things; the first is to assign blame and to understand what when wrong so it will not happen again. Sometimes when we have no other explanation we say things like, 'don't worry, it part of God's plan' or 'God will not give us more than we can handle'. Words like these are meant to offer comfort, but I do not find them helpful or comfortable. In some ways they end up blaming God for the tragedy or brokenness. Often we do not want to acknowledge that evil is around us. But I believe that God does not will evil for us and that tragedies are not a part of God's plan. Jesus says as much in the parable; the

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servants asked 'Where then did these weeds come from?' To which the master replied, 'an enemy has done this.'

It is in denying that evil exist which allows it to grow and prosper in ways we are not even aware of. C. S. Lewis, a well-known writer in the twentieth century wrote well of the evil around us, about how we cannot always determine the good from the evil. That while most of us would know true evil when confronted by it, because true evil can be very visible and recognizable. But the problem as he writes in his book, "*The Screwtape Letters*" is evil hardly ever that black and white, but comes to us in various shades of gray. The book is comprised of a series of letters exchanged between the devil and his apprentice. In the letters the devil counsels Screwtape not to be so bold as to push man away from Christianity, for to do so would make the man miss it even more. But to draw him away slowly, little by little until there is no longer any connection to his Christian way of life and he will not even notice or miss it. The devil suggests, as the man is getting ready to read or study or to practice his faith, to put a suggestion in his head about other things. Remind him as he is going to church of how nice it is outside and his need or promise to get more exercise. Maybe suggest he is hungry or thirsty as he gets ready to study the Bible and that he should get a drink of water before he settles down to read. Continuing these distractions so to not allow him to get into the habit of reading the Bible or doing his Bible study, then one day he will be too busy or not even think of picking up his Bible or going to church. So much of evil is done in the gray areas we barely recognize the evil or with the help of the devil, justify our actions and make excuses for ourselves.

But Paul in Romans is telling us there is no excuse. There is life in the flesh that leads to death, and then there is life in the Spirit, which gives us life. We

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have been claimed by the Spirit, thus we are children of God, and called to live a new life. The struggle is the world and life does not let go of us that easily, it takes energy and strength to endure in the world and not be of the world as we wait our redemption by our Father in Heaven. We did not receive this gift, just to fall back and to remain in the sin and the world we were in prior to the coming of the Spirit. For our lives have been changed, we are no longer the same as we were before. Paul asks "so why do we act like it has made no difference?" For now our spirit has been made one with the Spirit of God. Then in our self determination we want to go out and fix the problems which surround us which is the second thing we desire to do.

But Jesus in the parable addresses this as well. When the servants came to the master offering to get rid of the weeds in the field the master replied, 'it is not your job'. It was not the job of the servants to pull out the weeds, for they would not know or be able to get every weed and in the process they would hurt as much wheat as they would help. The job of separating the weeds and the wheat would be the job of the reapers who know and are able to separate the good seed from the bad. Jesus tells us and his disciples "it is not your job to make judgments, but to proclaim the word of the Lord". It will be at the end of the age when the reapers, the angels, will come and separate the good from the evil, the evildoers from the righteous, the children of the devil from the children of God.

Yet it is difficult as we wait for the final judgment to arrive. But thanks be to God we do not wait alone for we have received a spirit of adoption, as we await the redemption of our souls. Paul reminds us how it is we are to wait. We wait as children of God, joint heirs with Christ for the redemption of the world, set free from its bondage to decay so we might be the first fruits of the Spirit. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who

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hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

So we wait patiently, working to bear good fruit in the world trusting that the final judgment is in God's hands, trusting that God will redeem the world. We do not have to defeat evil or death that is God's job. Now that we have been set free we are able to care for our neighbor, to stand up against injustice, to support those who are in need as well as to love and care for ourselves. We do so with patience and hope, knowing that while the enemy is powerful our God is even more powerful and will accomplish all things according to his Word.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

He 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? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" 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 he 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.' He 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!