

“The wheat and the tares grow together”

July 17, 2011

Text: Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

I.

Our parable this morning suggests that it is difficult to separate good from evil ... that, in fact, the two live together, along side of each other.

It suggests, therefore, that we, as human beings, are not simple and not easily categorized. We're not simply all *this* or all *that*. We are a blending of all kinds of genes and motives and impulses and dispositions and attitudes and ideas and preferences. In other words, we're complicated.

In this sense, the parable of *the weeds and the wheat* is a revealing parable for *the United Church of Christ*. I say this because in the UCC, at our best, we're good at dealing with complexity. At our best, we see the ambiguity of life ... the ambiguity in people and in the compelling issues of our time.

To see the ambiguity of life is to be aware that our lives, our motives, and our virtues are never simply black or white. They're gray. But that's alright, because that's the way life is.

1. Think of the person who wants to run for city council. They want to be a city councilperson. That could be a noble thing to do. Still, we can't help but wonder: what are their motives?

Some of their motives might be relatively pure. They might feel genuinely drawn to public service ... to helping to make their community a better, more safe place to live. But there are probably other motives at work here as well (some *weeds* growing alongside of the *wheat*).

For example they might also want to be a city councilperson because of things like status ... ego ... power ... or, being able to be seen in community as a real *somebody*.

2. Or what about a policeman, or woman! Our police provide a much needed service to our community and most of them have good motives. Still, some are drawn to the police force because they like being in a position of authority and power. For some of them—mostly men—it's a bit of a *macho* or a *tough guy* thing.
3. And what about those of us in the Christian ministry? Pastors ... priests and those drawn into the holy orders? Although, hopefully, most are drawn into the ministry for genuine reasons, still, some are drawn to Christian ministry because of a need to appear virtuous and good and holy.

The point in all of this is that—easily—our motives are mixed. While our motives may be mostly virtuous and good, still, some of our hidden motivation may be more tainted.

We're human beings. Our lives can seldom be easily reduced to black and white. Even at our best, to some extent, our motives are gray. Again, we're not robots; we're human beings.

II.

Let's take a look at our parable, *The Parable of the wheat and the tares*. CHECK IT OUT!

In the parable, a man sows good seed in his field; later, an enemy comes and sows weeds (or, bad seed) among the wheat.

When the plants of wheat grow and bear grain, the weeds begin to appear as well. Seeing this, the workers of the man come and ask him:

Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?

The man answers, *An enemy has done this*.

Well, then, ask the workers, would you like us to go and gather the weeds?

Haltingly, the man answers: *no, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest; and at the harvest time I will tell the reapers to separate them, sending the weeds off to be burned and putting the wheat into my barn.*

III.

What the parable suggests is that we all have weeds in our lives ... potentially sinful impulses; motives that are less than 100% pure. We also have weeds in community and in our public and private lives—people in whom self-centeredness, greed and hunger for power are the primary motives that drive them.

But the larger point here is that these impulses, these motives and dispositions, live in each of us—to whatever extent—side by side. They're part of who we are as individuals.

1. If you take away the passion that perhaps sometimes becomes excessive in the football or basketball coach, he or she is not the same coach. While the coach's passion may not be perfect, it's still part of who the coach is.

2. We hear all the time about people who talk too much ... it's like they're almost too friendly. But if you take that talking nature out of them, they are no longer the friendly person whom—most of the time—we take delight in.

Let the wheat and the tares grow together, says Jesus. We all have tendencies and impulses that do not reflect our best.

The Apostle Paul understood this in a powerful way as we see revealed in Romans 7:15. CHECK IT OUT!

I do not understand my own actions, says Paul. *For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

Who among us cannot relate to that? How often do we find ourselves doing things that we later regret ... wondering: *now why did I do that? Or, what did I say that for? I didn't mean to do that or say that.*

We all have our bad moments from time to time. But why? What makes us like that?

The truth is—again—we're complicated people. The weeds—whatever they are—grow in us along with the wheat. Together, they are part of who we are. Our challenge, of course, is to find ways of dealing with the weeds so they don't take over our lives ... like they do, for example, with addictions to alcohol or prescription drugs or whatever it is.

IV.

Our parable this morning of the wheat and the tares invites the healing power of God's grace. The parable reveals our imperfections and, along with them, the rough edges of our lives.

We've got all this embattled *stuff* in us, living side by side—all of these passions and desires, these impulses and energies. And yet, God's grace comes, just the same, to each one of us with a word of quiet acceptance and love.

God understands that at times we *do the very thing we don't want to do*. Why? Sometimes we hardly know.

- Why do we take that extra drink?
- Or, departing from our diet, why do we cozy up to that luscious dish of ice cream?
- Why did we say what we did to our brother or sister, knowing that our comment would hurt them?
- Why do we fall into patterns of being too critical or negative? People don't like being around negative people. Can we blame them?

Why do we do what we do? Why, why, why???

The truth is, in our community life—both in and outside the Church—we're a blending of all kinds of people with all kinds of motives and strengths and weaknesses. It's not easy to sort us out.

Still, God comes to us each one—overflowing with grace—reaching out to us ... forgiving us our excesses, our lapses, our weak moments. God understands.

The fact that God understands, that God forgives and that God's grace is forever pouring out to us—welcoming us and seeking to reassure us in whatever ways—does not mean we're not supposed to do a better job of sorting ourselves out and rising above the weeds in our minds, hearts and spirits.

We are. Still, even in the process of weeding ourselves out, our diverse humanity and the rougher edges of our spirit can be a beautiful thing. Again, we're not robots; and what a boring world it would be if we were all alike.

V.

A pastor tells the story of when he was a young man during his seminary days of training to become a pastor. Back then, he says, *my ideal congregation was **The Church of the Savior** in Washington, DC. Among my peers and friends, he goes on, that church was the ideal ...it inspired us and was the model church towards which we aspired.*

It was a small congregation of 200 people, he remembers, who renewed their spiritual vows each year. Their vows were to tithe, to attend Bible study every week, to pray every day, and to be politically active for the poor every week in some way. And each year they signed the dotted line, reaffirming these basic commitments. They were a high commitment church.

That was my ideal church, he says, back then.

But not anymore. Now I realize that the life of faith is never that easy. Now I want a church that is wide open to all people, including the uncommitted, the half committed, the lukewarm, the confused, the puzzled, the materialists, the totally messed up; the addicted, the afflicted ...whoever you are.

Wow, sounds like the United Church of Christ to me. In fact, the experience of this pastor was my experience as well back in the seventies when I was in seminary. We'd all heard of Church of the Savior. Still, I love the openness to diversity in our church.

Like we say in the welcoming time before every service of worship: **No matter who you are or where you are along your life's journey, you're welcome here.**

Let the wheat and the tares grow together.

VI.

As the parable suggests, whatever *sorting out* there is—whatever *judgment*—it’s God’s domain. It’s not for us to worry about. Our calling is to love ... and in the process to let the chips of our lives fall where they may.

In our love, we seek the best for the other person ... the best for the community. When we truly seek to do the *loving thing*, the *loving act*, the weeds of our lives get sorted out.

It’s a process; and in the process—increasingly—the *wheat* takes over, made tougher and more resilient by the weeds ...

- and we become a better person ...
- a more evolved person ...
- a more loving and compassionate person.
- And the world becomes a better place.

And then, as Matthew concludes in our reading this morning: *the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of God. Let anyone with ears listen!*

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com