

**“Let the wheat and the weeds grow together!”**  
*Accepting the good and the bad in ourselves and in others ...*

**July 20, 2008**

*Text: Romans 8:12-17, Matthew 13:24-30*

I.

One of the things I love about the Bible is the diversity of its teachings; and how they come to us in a range of literary types and forms.

To begin with, in the Hebrew Scriptures,

1. we've got the *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible, also known as the *Laws of Moses*.
2. Then we have the historical books and the wisdom literature, followed by the *major prophets* and the *minor prophets*, although not everybody agrees that the book of Daniel is major or that the books of Hosea and Amos are minor.

Passing on to the Christian Scriptures, we've got the *gospels*, of course, the *letters of Paul*, other *letters* attributed to Paul, letters known as the *pastorals*, a grouping of *minor letters* ... concluding with the enigmatic book of *Revelation* which, frankly, to this day, no one understand.

The wisdom literature is generally considered to be the book of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, including Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

However, the teaching this morning from Jesus' **Parable of the weeds and the wheat** would certainly seem to be *wisdom at its finest*. Again, that's what's beautiful about the Bible: if we pay attention, there are a wealth of *probing insights* and compelling *glimpses* of truth and wisdom.

The **parable** is really pretty simple. But the reaches of its teachings are significant. In the parable, Jesus is trying to convey to his disciples a sense of the *kingdom of heaven*; in other words, *what's it like?*

And what does it have to say about the *nature of God* ... and about the nature of reality ... and our own nature as human beings?

II.

A man goes out and sows good seed in his field ... but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. Later, when the plants came up and bore grain, the weeds appeared as well.

The laborers told the master about this, asking, *where did these weeds come from?*

The master answered that an enemy had done this. The laborers then inquired, *Do you want us to go and gather them?*

But the landowner replied, *No, for in gathering the weeds you would also uproot the wheat along with them. **Let both of them grow together*** until the harvest.

In other words, **let the wheat and the weeds grow together**. For, if you take out the weeds, you'll be taking out the wheat along with them. And the wheat, which is good and useful, will perish along with the weeds.

Opening this up a bit, we're urged to be careful in how we deal with good and evil because they live along side of each other in the human heart and spirit. Often times, if we eradicate the evil, we take away the good along with it.

### III.

If we think about ourselves and others—loved ones and friends whom we know well—there's a wise teaching here.

None of us is perfect, without flaws or rough edges. We all have our stuff: our unevenness, our eccentricities or excesses ... our imperfections ... what might sometimes be called *our sinful tendencies or proclivities*.

Sometimes, it's just the way we are. Not that we can't change; but sometimes if we change too much, we're no longer who we are and we lose some of our essence ... some of our best self.

It gets complicated at this point because the **parable** certainly suggests that *the weeds* will be eradicated at the harvest, or at the end of time ... or whatever is the final judgment.

- At the same time, it gives no justification for the existence of the weeds—suggesting that they do *not* come from God but from Satan.
- Ideally, perhaps, the weeds would be eliminated. But, again, we learn: it's not that easy, because they grow entwined with the wheat.

In other words, good and evil, or the potential for good and evil, live along side of each other ... in us, in our spirit ... and in the ethos and the spirit of groups and nations as well.

***The wheat and the weeds grow together.***

If we can accept ... that—according to the **parable**—there will be a *sorting out* at the harvest (at the time of judgment—however we understand it), a useful teaching of the **parable** is that it helps us deal with the *ambiguity* of life.

*Ambiguity* suggests that there are often multiple meanings in things, more than one interpretation—in events and happenings, in virtues and vices.

#### IV.

Coming to an awareness and personal acceptance of this can be liberating for us as individuals. It can help us to be less harsh and judgmental of ourselves and others.

It gets tricky, at this point, because the intent is never to justify and support the vices or excesses or the potential for sin.

Having a healthy sense of the *ambiguity* of things can be helpful to the human spirit. For example, being *trusting* is a good thing, a virtuous quality. But sometimes we can be *too* trusting, to the point where people take advantage of us. That doesn't mean we should never trust anyone; it simply means we need to be aware of the ambiguity in it all.

Being a *hard-working* person would always be considered a high virtue in our culture. But as we all know, when *hard-working* translates into workaholic, problems arise—problems that can end up dysfunctioning an entire family.

The *ambiguity* of virtue is an interesting notion. But where it can be helpful to us is at the point of acceptance—both of ourselves and others.

A person can be too *opinionated*. But then again, it's nice to know where a person stands on issues. Having opinions can be a good thing.

In fact, anyone of us can be too much of anything. Too energetic and too risky, too passionate and too intense and on and on ...

But the point is that if you take a particular quality *out of us*, you change who we are. We're no longer the same person. What is required in all of us is a sense of balance in the choices we make and in how we live out our strengths and virtues.

#### V.

Deeply passionate people, for example, have the ability to do great things—in the arts, in sports; in the cause for social justice, in the sharing of the gospel ... whatever it is.

Sometimes, however, they go overboard and the passions flow too deeply. So, what do we do?

Do we try to tame the passion? Well, maybe so; but if we tame it too much, they won't be the same person. Then you won't get the same result in all of these areas—in the arts, in sports, in social justice, the ministry and on and on.

We hear all the time about the eccentricities of artists ... about their weirdness. Often times, their weirdness is part of what enables them to be the creative and productive artists they are. Take out the weirdness and they're not the same person and cannot produce the same art.

All the time in sports we see demonstrations of excess—outbursts, expressions of anger, sometimes going over the top, which is never good. At the same time, the fire that feeds these expressions is the same *burning fire from within* that enables the athlete to perform at such a high level of excellence to begin with.

Again, what is needed is a sense of balance. *The wheat and the weeds grow together.*

## VI.

If we listen to the **Apostle Paul** in all of this, he'd suggest we give ourselves to the life of the Spirit ... which is to *give ourselves to Christ*.

For Paul, the impulses of the flesh were in constant tension with the promptings of the Spirit. Therefore, if we can will ourselves to be led by the Spirit, we'll rise above the lower impulses of the flesh.

Being *in Christ*, says Paul, enables us to do this: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*. The point being: when we're led by the Spirit, we belong to God.

Still, the question of what to do with the weeds lingers. For, although we give ourselves to Christ, the ambiguity is still there. The weeds still grow.

Friends, at the end of the day, we're not robots of perfection—always doing and saying exactly the *right* thing. What Jesus understands, more than Paul, here, is that our lives are complex ... we're complex. Life is ambiguous. Moreover, there's a down side to perfection.

1. To begin with, it doesn't exist. It's an illusion bequeathed to us by Greek philosophy where notions of perfection were common place. In actuality, none of us is perfect; nor, if we think about it, would we ever want to be. In this light, therefore, we'd be better served by aiming for excellence.
2. Also, trying to be perfect works against an awareness and acceptance of the weeds we all contend with in our lives on a daily basis.

## VII.

Sometimes, the best thing we can do is to be aware of our flaws and our potential for excess and try to bring them under control; rather than always thinking we have to totally eliminate them; and that, until we do, we're somehow flawed and a *bad person* ... and displeasing to God.

Again, we're not robots.

How many of us beat ourselves up mercilessly over our imperfections? Trying to be more perfect than we can ever be and still remain our essential self??

According to the **parable**, God will sort it all out at the harvest. In the mean time, ***let the wheat and the weeds grow together.***

And do, as we reflect on all of this, a question emerges: *what about the grace?* The weeds that grow in the spirit of each one of us are a reminder that we're all human—rough edges and all.

We're all in need of God's *grace*. And we're all in need of God's acceptance and understanding which—by the grace of God—everyday—lifts us into God's divine presence.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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