

The 6th Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 11 Year A
The Rev. Elizabeth Meade July 20, 2014
[Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43](#)

**“While everybody was asleep,
an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat,
so when the plants came up and bore grain,
and the weeds appeared as well.” (Matt 13:25)**

It probably speaks to my age, but when I was young, we called this the parable of the wheat and the tares. Do any of you remember that? For the longest time, growing up, when my mother conscripted us into helping her weed the garden, I thought I had to really TEAR those weeds out... because they were TARES. So forgive me if I use the words weeds and tares interchangeably today; I'm just showing my age!

This parable would have made utter sense to the subsistence farmers of 1st century Palestine. Land is so precious there, and rain so scarce, that the issue of weeds is a major one. Weeds take up what little arable land there is; and weeds suck the water and nutrients away from the “good” crops.

But Jesus explains the parable is a metaphor – a way to instruct us into the Christian life. And how easy it is for us to sit here in the security of this beautiful sanctuary, and to declare ourselves WHEAT! We are, by and large, good people, trying to live decent Christian lives. The Taliban, the Columbian Drug Lords, the Gang Members roaming the streets of Chicago with handguns – THEY are the Tares, the Weeds. Such is our human inclination, is it not? Our penchant for judgment and condemnation; for declaring the future of those we deem somehow – DAMNED? It's the way we wrap our minds around the very real problem of EVIL. We frequently succumb to pronouncing judgment upon each other; It's so easy to point the finger; to label and judge.

Just this week, I had lunch with an old college friend. In catching up about where our children are now and how their lives are unfolding, Mary tearfully asked me to keep her daughter Caitlyn in my prayers. Caitlyn, it seems, isn't “saved.” Caitlin isn't a “believer.” Caitlyn, apparently, is going to burn “in the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, to quote from today's Gospel reading. My friend has essentially written off her own daughter, and, in doing so, has utterly missed the point of today's Gospel lesson.

Listen again to the text:

“The slaves said to him, ‘Master, do you want us to go and rip out the weeds?’ But the landowner replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; then I will instruct the angels to separate the wheat from the weeds.’” (Matt 13: 28-30)

So.... Do you want the Good News or the Bad News first? The Bad news is that Evil exists and it is pernicious. AND, the Bad News is that God isn't going to come down full of wrath, with sword drawn, and rip that evil out of the world so that we can go about our daily lives in peace.

And here's the Good News: God isn't going to come down full of wrath, with sword drawn, and rip that evil out of the world so that we can go about our daily lives in peace.

"Huh," you might say.

"Huh? That's the same thing as the bad news."

Yes it is.

Charles Schultz, creator of the Peanuts comic strip, once drew a perfect strip to explain this parable. In it, we find Lucy was trying to explain the presence of good and evil in the world to her little brother, Linus. She tells him that he, like all of us, have these two forces inside of us: Good and evil. Linus looks at his stomach with a distressed look on his face and declares,

"I can feel them in there fighting."

This parable, then, teaches us three important lessons.

First, it serves as a warning to those of us who might occasionally be tempted to play God and judge others' actions, choices, and manners of life. Don't do it, the parable screams! Resist the urge to play God. Resist the human propensity to judge others and examine your own life instead.

Second, this parable offers us a glimpse into the nature of God.

While the slaves are eager to offer to go out and rip out those tares (like I did when I was as child), God suggests a different way.

God says:

Let the weeds and the wheat grow up together. Why risk harming our tender shallow roots by tearing out the weeds before the harvest is ready? After they've both had a change to mature, I'll let my angels do the reaping and the separating.

In other words, God in God's mercy, has resisted the urge to pluck out our eyeballs every time we have sinned! God allows us a lifetime to get it right: A LIFETIME of mistakes and sins, and endless opportunities to choose the right path. In God's way of thinking, we are all beloved. Just a few chapters back, we are reminded:

*God causes his sun to rise on both the evil and the good,
and sends rain down upon the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt 5:45)*

This is very Good News.

Finally, this parable invites us to claim our own salvation. Lucy and Linus were right. Each of us has both Good and Evil dwelling within us, and like Linus, we often feel them, inside of us, battling it out. This parable warns us that there will, indeed, be a day of judgment, but that, with God's help, we can prevent the weeds from strangling the wheat. Goodness wins. God's mercy prevails.

God says:

Ultimately, my children, I will judge and dispose of the weeds. Judging others is not your job. In the field which is your life, I will send rains down upon you all, and sunshine and nourishment. Drink from my abundance, and when life gets messy, when the tares feel like they are strangling you, remember that I am with you – to the end of the age.

The perfect example of this paradox of Good and Evil lying side by side in the world and in our lives was played out in Stephen Spielberg's film, "Schindler's List." If you know the story, you will remember that Schindler, a factory owner, saved a thousand Jews from certain death during WWII. A hero, right? One of the good guys. And yet, Spielberg himself describes Schindler as "an enterprising, womanizing Nazi Party member and German industrialist who was a war profiteer, who exploited the cheap labor of Jewish workers for his own financial gains."

Schindler himself revealed his motivation with these words:

Three hundred and fifty workers on the factory floor with one purpose: to make money - for me! They won't soon forget the name of Oskar Schindler either. He did something extraordinary. He came here with nothing, and built a bankrupt company into a major manufactory. And left with a steamer trunk, no, TWO steamer trunks, full of money.

Schindler was no angel. He was simply human, like the rest of us.

In him, we see the propensity for Good and Evil residing in one flawed man. And God enters in and waters and nourishes us; both the Good and the Evil. God becomes wheat with us and for us, enduring the tangled weeds that vex us, and enduring the harvest too, so that we may be redeemed.

And In the fullness of time, the parable tells us, God will strip away that which we do not need and burn it so that we can arise, separated from the weeds into newness of life.

And that is, indeed, Good News.
Amen.