

A Moral drilling or Gracious Living

7 Pentecost A - July 18, 2020

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus tells a parable about the coexistence of good and evil in this world. God's judgment will remove all evildoers and causes of sin, but not until the end of human history.

²⁴Jesus put before the crowd another parable: "The dominion of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.' "

³⁶Then 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." ³⁷Jesus answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son-of-Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of God's dominion; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son-of-Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his dominion all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the dominion of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

People often perceive church/faith/religion to be about rules.... issues of right/wrong, good/bad, clean/dirty or naughty thinking, virtuousness vs selfishness, following rules or expectations or someone who is just a rulebreaker, etc. And people often believe the church exists to clarify right vs wrong etc. and then to urge, strengthen and equip people to live this way. If you don't live this way in general or have a slip-up or a moment of frustration or anger and someone from church sees that moment they're liable to say, "Well, that wasn't very Christian," or "she shouldn't act that way," or "he's a bad person (or insert your negative adjective here), " or there's a Champion Sinner!"

*This type of text is often lifted up to support that dichotomous, moralistic and judgmental thinking. Mainline/Classic Grace oriented doctrine does NOT support that thinking. It is NOT the church's mission to tell you how you should live your life or should behave or should, should, should..... and if you don't live that way you'll surely go to hell or a lake of eternal burning fire (v42), etc. It **IS** the church's mission to proclaim how Jesus spoke to the people who likely had this frame of understanding and tried their best to obey all the religious rules to be assured of acceptability to God and entrance to the blessings of God.*

They thought obedience, rule-following and moralistic living was the way to heaven or a good life. Jesus' stories come and invite them into a deeper understanding.....an understanding of how a LOVING, GRACIOUS God relates to people and creation not a sadistic god who demands rule following and justice even to having the Son suffer on a Cross to fulfill some payment for all of the sins of the world (traditional atonement view). Instead more contemporary views reflect the idea that this death is how far God's love will go to show mercy, grace and a desire to connect and therefore lead people in experiencing the most fulfilling life possible.

Judgment stories like this then are an encouragement to: 1) not quickly or harshly judge others by the criteria we think/believe/convicted are to be used (think even Santa songs about judging who's naughty or nice), 2) leave ultimate judgments to God and know that they will come, 3) have confidence in having time to use your "bad choices, experiences, chapters, attitudes, etc." to bring wisdom into your life so that bad seed weeds can even have a place and perhaps eventually a positive place in your life's storied garden.

- A) What weeds have been sown by you, by your choices, by your circumstances in your life?*
- B) Who/What have/do you identify as the "Enemy" who has sowed these bad seeds in your life, your community, the country, the world? Have you taken responsibility for your garden and what has grown in it – whether you or others did the seed sowing? How do you know you have truly done that?*
- C) How have you come to see/understand or use those weeds in shaping who you are and how you see the world?*
- D) How has an awareness that there will be a Day of Judgment (even from a merciful God that has already given us a Savior to partner with us on that day)*

impacted your growth, development and vision of who you have become and can be in your life?

E) How has this shaped your value on things like compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, not being quick-tempered, etc. toward yourself or others?

F) How has this wisdom that you have earned in life affected your interactions with others such as parenting, supervising, mentoring, grandparenting, speaking truth to friends, being honest with yourself?

G) Notice the end of the story is the righteous that shine like the sun. Since Salvation begins now and comes to fulfilment in heaven.... What does this mean for you on this side of paradise? What are you doing, learning, experiencing now that empowers you to begin “shining” even today?