

July 23, 2017

“A Parable of God’s Reign”

Matthew 13:24-30-36-43

This morning, we hear the message of God’s Kingdom, or we might say, God’s Reign on earth, God’s way of doing things in the world. That may not be our way or what most people might do, but God’s way. It was told in a parable.

A landowner went to his fields and planted wheat. While people were sleeping and not watching, an evil one came and planted weeds among the good wheat. The evil one is described as “an enemy” of the landowner.

This sort of thing seems to have happened at the time of Jesus. Rival landowners messed with each other’s crops in hopes of increasing their own profits at the market - a problem common enough that Roman law specifically forbade the sowing of poisonous plants in another’s field. The poisonous plant in question here is “darnel,” a kind of ryegrass that looked like wheat in its early stages. So it was also called ‘fake wheat’, and grew under the same conditions as wheat. Wheat that had been mixed with darnel while harvesting often led to intoxication and dizziness. Darnel could only be distinguished from wheat when the heads appeared on the stalk. (p.p.)

Time passed after the landowner planted wheat. Both wheat and weeds grew side by side and at some point, it became clear that weeds had been planted among the wheat. The servants of the landlord came to him and offered to pull the weeds from the fields.

The landlord said to them, “Don’t do that. By weeding the fields, you may pull the wheat too and damage it.” (pause) Those who have weeded any garden, yard or fields know that in weeding we also pull the flowers or the plants we planted whose roots are tangled together with those of the weeds.

The landlord’s order is this. “Let both grow now. At the time of harvest, I will send harvesters to bring in wheat and to throw away the weeds.”

This is a parable of God’s way of doing things. (pause) When his disciples came to Jesus and asked about the meaning of this parable, he told them that the harvesters are angels, who will harvest the good fruits and throw away the evil ones in the end time.

What does this parable tell us about this world and how to live in it as God’s children, the wheat planted by God? (pause) Since God’s words are living, a parable may give different messages to each of us and in each different stage of our lives. To proclaim that this is the message of the parable may not do justice to the Living Word, but let me try to lift up some themes that run through this parable.

First, this parable tells us that **there is both good and evil co-existing or even allowed to co-exist in this world.** God didn't plant evil. It was planted by God's enemy, evil or the devil.

Second, **by trying to remove evil or evil ones, we may even do some harm to the good wheat since the roots are entangled.** This makes us feel humbled, doesn't it? Our roots are entangled with bad ones. We are not totally good but both good and evil co-exist in us.

This leads us to the third point. **Do not be judgmental towards those who are showing the signs of darnel, the poisonous plant.** Jesus associated with those who the "righteous" in society looked down on as "weeds," such as tax collectors, people with loose morals, the outsiders called Gentiles, and those who were afflicted with sickness and diseases of all kinds, including those judged by society as "unclean." In his grace-filled encounter with them, they were changed, transformed and made whole...bore the fruits of wheat.

The words we hear often, "Hate the sin and love the sinner" may well fit in here, being fully aware that we are all sinners as Romans 3:23 says, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." Let me read the following verse too. "Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. God did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins." (3:24)

The fourth point is this: **only carefully trained angels will make a judgment (not us) and God's reign prevails in the end.**

So how shall we live in this world as the wheat planted by God, our Creator?

--Continue to grow as wheat so that we may bear good fruit.

--Share grace with our neighbors with whom, for good or ill, our roots are intertwined.

--Trust in the expertise of God and God's angels to sort out everything in the end.

I would like to end with a devotional from Upper Room on July 5 this year, which gives us food for thought, regarding good and evil.

I could smell the paint drying on my latest work as I knelt to pray, "Thank you, God, for inspiring me to do this piece. Now whom do you want me to give it to?" God brought my sister to mind, but I said, "Lord, she's an atheist." My sister would roll her eyes anytime someone spoke about religion. However, I obeyed God's nudging, even enclosing a note explaining that God had told me to send the painting to her. Weeks later I received her response: "I was praying to God for a sign. Then I got this piece from you not even an hour later. When I read that God told you it was for me, I cried. I have opened my heart to God."

My sister may think I was the answer to her prayer, but really she was the answer to mine. God helped our prayers to intersect at a critical juncture that changed both our lives for the better.

Being in prison on death row, I often question how and why God would possibly use me. I struggle with feelings of worthlessness despite being a sincere, repentant believer and despite the

Bible's saying God has a plan for each of us. My sister's letter affirmed to me that God can work through every member of the body of Christ, including me and my sister.

Let me end with the prayer that was written for the day.

Prayer: Dear God, give us the faith to obey **your Spirit**, even when we don't know or understand what you're trying to accomplish. Amen.