

Pentecost 7A

Mathew 13 24-30, 36-43

July 23, 2017

Just this past week a friend of mine shared an article
They found on a Christian website.

In it, the author describes a vision she had
In which she could recognize certain people who were in hell.

The author said she saw many well-known Christians in history,
People whom most would agree lived faithfully and well,
Who were trapped in the outer darkness
Where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

One the one hand I almost laugh at such reflections
Posted on homebrewed websites laying claim
To mainline Christian theology.

How easy it was to dismiss such ramblings,
To scorn the one who made such wild accusations
About some of the most beloved saints throughout time.
To discount the authors judgement.

But on the other hand, who is the one judging now?

True or false, right or wrong, yes or no, good or evil:
The almost sacred need for simple dichotomies
That characterize human existence and perception.

And while there are many parts of our modern lives
That might lead us to think these splits
Are a recent development,

The gospel author reminds us again today
That the simplicity of one versus the other
Has been a way of thinking for centuries.

Wheat and weeds, sheep and goats, darkness and light, good and evil,
The metaphors of the parables are generally boiled down
To just that kind of binary system: one or the other.

And when confronted with such a decision,
We're inclined to just start choosing.

Which one is better for us, for me?
Which am I? Which do I want to be?
Am I living wheat or a strangling weed?

This kind of reflection or soul-searching
Is not inherently or completely incorrect.

But the real danger that comes when we start choosing
Is when we start believing that our choices, our judgements,
Are better than anyone else's.

When we start applying our judgment on others.
He must be a weed. She is a goat.
They are headed for straight to that outer darkness.

Because then, as the parable reminds us, we start doing God's job,
And humans have a pretty bad track record
When it comes to doing God's job.

Bill McNabb is an author who wrote in an old issue of "The Door",
A now out-of-print magazine drawing inspiration
From Martin Luther's posting of the 95 theses
On the Wittenburg Church edifice.

He writes, "My professor began and ended his apologetics lecture
with one sentence:

"You defend God like you defend a lion –
You get out of God's way."
God, it seems, has never had much trouble
With God's enemies, it's the friends who give God fits."

In the parable, the servants see the weeds
And immediately relay the news to the landowner.
Their plan is both conventional and brief:
"We'll get rid of the weeds!"

But the gardener advises patience.
"Let them grow together, for in disturbing the weeds now
You risk damaging what is good."

For in judging now what is to be removed
You risk uprooting the good work already done.

Pastor Brian Stoffregen points out that,
"Yes, the sowing of the bad seeds probably decreased
SOME of the wheat's fruit-bearing,
but it didn't destroy the good wheat.
Sure it created an inconvenience for the owner;
but even with the weeds in the field,
the owner is still going to reap a good harvest.

But if the well-meaning slaves
Had pulled out the weeds as they wanted,
They would have destroyed the good wheat.
 There would have been NO fruit for their lord.

In their eagerness to please,
They would have obliterated the whole harvest.
 The slaves could easily have become more
 destructive 'enemies' than the 'enemy'!"

Interestingly enough, the servants are the only characters
 In the parable that are not explained by Jesus
 As he discusses the parable with the disciples.

Perhaps, one could say, leaving room for them and us
 To find our spot in the story.

A spot in this parable that reminds us that
 Our haste to dwell in only the good/bad, wheat/weed
 Dichotomies of the world is not what we are called to do.

But rather to live in patience, to live in hope that the kingdom
 Will be sorted out by the one who promises to sort it out.
 By the one whose job it IS to sort it out.
 By the one who does that job very well.

Our call is to know and trust and proclaim a God
 Who deals in mercy, grace, and love.

Jesus the Christ reveals that the God
For whom we long in the midst of the world's – and our own –
Sin and brokenness is a faithful, loving,
And powerful God who holds true to divine promise.

This means that the God of judgement
Is the very same God of grace.

And in spite of all our fears and sins,
In spite of our hasty and selfish and weedy desires
To be the deciding ones,
This God loves us. This God loves the world.
And this God saves from punishment.

The gardener commends patience.
Wait for the whole field to grow.
Wait for the rains to fall, the sun to warm, the time to pass.

Wait for the mysterious growth and transformation that takes place
When this loving, saving God does something incredible:

Like taking the weediest parts of ourselves and our neighbors
Upon a cross to die, so that the very best remains.

Then, set free from artificial labels and divisions,
Set free from the nagging desire to judge,
The righteous will shine like the very sun
That bore them into life.

Amen.