

## 19 July 2020: Matt 13 24-30,36-43 (Proper 11)

I am naturally drawn to the parable in today's Gospel, often referred to as the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds. Here is a parable for the horticulturally challenged, of which I am one. At the heart of the parable is this dilemma: Is it a useful plant or a weed? Which is preliminary to the greater question, "should I pluck it out?"

The word in the parable translated 'weed' is 'darnel.' It is a weed which, in early stages of growth, looks like wheat. It is only later that the weeds and wheat can be distinguished. By then removal of the useless would destroy some of the good. The farmer says wait until harvest, so that all the wheat may be gathered, so none is lost to overzealousness.

This is one of Jesus' parables that is deceptively simple to understand, which means we are in danger of giving it only brief attention. Jesus' teaching in the story is always relevant. Certainly, during Jesus' ministry there were many people coming and going; some with great enthusiasm on Monday, who by Friday had disappeared or proven to be pains-in-the-neck. We know from the New Testament that the early Church was chaotic. We know from Church History there have been many groups, sub-groups, movements, parties, opinions, and disputes perpetually threatening the visible unity of Christians. Indeed, one of my teachers in seminary once quipped: "if anyone wants a good argument for atheism just read Church History." Beware of idolatrous nostalgia, conjuring some idealized past of harmonious, sweet agreement. It does not nor has it ever existed.

The challenge of the parable remains: leaving judgment to God, in God's time and with God's wisdom. We can expect little encouragement outside the Church for this ideal. Fueled by the 24-hour news cycle, our society glorifies the provocative, sensational, amoral, and inflammatory; the humble, compassionate, principled, and conciliatory are ignored, or denounced. This is not merely a political reality—as disgusting and damaging as that is—it is too often the case among Christians. Christians seem at times to have a preoccupation with quarreling and division.

Jesus' answer is the same now as then: wait for God's judgment. This is what Jesus asks of us, not merely because we cannot achieve God's mercy and justice but because our perspective is so limited. Even at times when we think we are right, when we know 'in our bones' we are doing the right thing, the 'law of unintended consequences' rears its head; we can destroy some of the good while trying to root out the bad. What is called for is not complacency, but radical trust in God. God will uproot whatever evil needs to be uprooted, but only finally at the end of time, as the kingdom dawns. For the time being, God desires us to outgrow evil through the power of Christ's loving-kind mercy at work in us and through us.

Wait for God's final judgment: final not just chronologically; final in that it will be complete and will reveal all things, even hidden things, even the secrets of the human heart. God's judgment will reveal not only each one's intentions, but each one's wounds, burdens, and failings—those that are self-inflicted and those inflicted on each one. Who are we to condemn, cast out, denounce? Is not God's judgment better than ours?

In the mid-nineteenth century a quiet Old Testament professor at Oxford University was banned from preaching for three years because a sermon he gave was considered contrary to Church of England belief. Among other things, Edward Pusey, believed and taught that the Church of England is part of Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and not a department of the State, indeed, that the State ought have no power over ecclesiastical matters. He obeyed his censure and did not preach for three years. He believed he was right, yet he left final judgment to God. He wrote: "Work on then in bright hope. Not a thing which you have ever done for God has been lost...while we each do the little we can do, we may leave the rest to Him."

Do not become fixated on evil—practice discernment, not judgment. Cast no one out—be merciful. Let us be humble, compassionate, principled, and conciliatory with everyone, in all our affairs. Let us grow in the Lord's kind wisdom and wait for God's righteous, merciful, and final judgment on us all.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, forever and ever. Amen.