

SPG#177, Pentecost 10A, Proper 11

July 20, 2008

Genesis 28:10-19a

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

At first glance today's gospel seems pretty straightforward with a moral to the story and a clearly defined lesson. But as one reads deeper into the story as told by Jesus, it becomes more troublesome and challenging. The story is the parable of the sower, who sowed good wheat seeds. When the seeds sprouted and came up, weeds came up with the good plants.

Well, having weeds is not what we would call desirable. But it is not uncommon either.

When the servants of the sower, or the householder, as he is called, notice the weeds, they tell the sower. Well, instead of saying, "Gee, that is too bad." Or "Why don't you and the other servants pull the weeds out, he says, "An enemy has done this."

When they ask him if they are to pull out the weeds, he says, "No, because of the danger of pulling up the good wheat with the weeds, let the plants and the weeds grow together until harvest. Then we will pull the weeds separately and burn them up, and harvest the wheat to go into the barn."

Then Jesus interprets the parable. He says **The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.**

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

So much for a few seeds and some weeds. In the beginning the story appears to be about keeping the weeds out of one's life. But in the interpretation everything assumes an increasing eternal importance as Jesus speaks of the Son of Man, of angels, of the devil, the children of the evil one, and the righteous. We could wonder about which angels will be sent to be reapers. We could ask for further clarification on the name "Son of Man."

We could inquire further about who are the children of the evil one. We could wonder about the nature of the one Jesus refers to as the devil. We could ask more about weeping and gnashing of teeth. In fact, we could spend a lot of time on any one of the fantastic personalities and fantastic spiritual occurrences Jesus refers to in his interpretation. But if we did that alone and stopped, we would be missing the larger point of the parable. The larger point of the story has to do with the good seeds, the wheat, and their problems with the weeds. I think it is fair to say that Jesus is speaking to his followers in this parable, to his disciples, to us. And that would make us the good seeds, the wheat. One of the troublesome parts of this parable is the concept of weeds.

Any gardener knows that having a vegetable garden or flowers includes putting up with a few weeds. But in this parable weeds are seen as completely unacceptable. The weeds in the parable are even life threatening to the good plants if one dares to try to pull them out.

But again, making huge sweeping spiritual statements and overstating the commonplace is part of what goes on in this parable.

To be sure, all of us have weeds in our lives. And as much as we plan on or move toward integrity, there are things in life that will complicate the journey. As early as the second century, one of the early apostolic fathers, Hermas, spoke of the good and bad angels each of us has inside. And he said we must take care not to put our trust in “the wrong angel.” Perhaps one of the pitfalls in aspiring to this or that is that finally we get to a point where we feel we have graduated from being human. I think I have told some of you the story of when I was in chaplain’s training early in my career. In the training I was assigned to work on a general surgical floor of a hospital in Texas. I was impressed with what I had learned to that point, and felt that what I had to offer as a chaplain/pastor was of extreme importance. So, one day I visited an older woman. She did not have anything to say. So I went on about my church affiliation, about my training program, about my family, and a host of other things I have thankfully forgotten. Finally I ran out of steam. Whereupon she gave me a card that said, “I am a deaf mute.”

I believe that all of us have reminders of our humanity on every corner. Any one of us can perform an astonishing service of understanding and compassion and then in the next breath fall flat on our face. The weeds, it seems, are everywhere. And so I think that is what Jesus is saying, in part, in this parable. We are called to always be aware of the weeds, to always be aware of our humanity. But we are also called to live with integrity, to live in purity, honesty, and love.

And we are called to live impeccably. At the end of the gospel today Jesus says that finally when all the weeds have been cleared, the righteous will **shine like the sun**.

As I witness your lives in Christ in this church, I observe when someone seems to shine like the sun in love and service. And that is wonderful to see. For that integrity, that impeccability, is an encouragement to all of us. But underneath those desires to be wonderful and astonishing you will find regular old you and regular old me.

For we are also called to know who we are. It is a Christ like thing, to be aware of our call and our humanity. So I can do no better than that. As we follow I call upon us to live with integrity, to live impeccably. And I call upon us to be constantly vigilant in seeing the weeds, in knowing who we are. For in so doing, in Christ, we will shine like the sun. Amen.