

Year A, Proper 10-Pentecost 6-Let Anyone with Ears Listen!

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Matthew 13:24-30

Let Anyone with Ears Listen!

Jesus knows something in us resists seeing truth and so he uses parables that twist on us. In the parable we have just read something sinister has happened out in the fields. Evil has gotten sown with good and now they grow together.

Upon noticing this, the slaves of the householder come and say, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?” They are shocked at the presence of weeds. Farmers hate weeds. They are like flags of accusation waving in the wind. Maybe they wanted the land owner to know they didn’t plant those seeds.

With an inquisitional tone they ask “Where then did these weeds come from?” I am surprised the householder does not take offense at the slave’s question, suggesting as it does, that the householder is to blame. The householder calming replies, “An enemy has done this.” He seems to know what happened and is not surprised.

Andrew Marr in his book [Moving and Resting in God’s Desire](#) sees the field densely filled with intertwined plants as an image of our entanglement with the desires of other people. Since we desire the desire of the other and the other desires what they think we desire, our desires get all entangled and impossible to separate without destroying both the wheat and the weeds. But here is the problem; we each see our desire as wheat while the others competing desire we see as weeds. Pull them up, they are weeds we say.

The slaves are very eager to remove the weeds. Master, set us loose on those weeds and we will tear them out.

Tragically the news often illustrates the wheat and weeds dilemma. Here is an example from three years ago: If we are Israel we say “we will deal with this Palestinian problem. We will weed out Hamas.” If we are Hamas we say “we will continue to attack the Israelis so they will show their “weedy-ness” to the world in how many of us they kill.” Do you see how both sides are attempting to get rid of evil? Each sees the other as the weed that must be destroyed.

Could it be the weeds sown in the good field is the human tendency to see the other who is our rival as evil and therefore subject to elimination? We say they are the problem and getting rid of them is the solution. That move is the human problem—that precise move. The enemy who sowed the bad seed in the first place is the accuser, the one the New Testament calls “the satan,” the personification of the pointing finger. The bad seed that got sown among the good

is the satanic mechanism that divides good and evil and excludes and destroys on the basis of its accusation. Wasn't the knowledge of good and evil the forbidden fruit in the original garden? When we think we know good from evil, wheat from weeds, we create much evil.

The slaves eagerly ask, "Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?" "No; answers the householder, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them." It's so hard to tell wheat from weeds and they are so entangled. Our eyes lack discernment and our hands are too clumsy. Any attempt to throw out evil before the harvest will destroy the wheat with the weeds.

No, the householder said, "Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvest time I'll say to the harvesters, 'First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.'" What if the weeds are not persons, as we had thought, but unjust accusations and lies that betray the innocent? These are the weeds that get bundled and burned. What if the wheat is the human species, God's beloved, the very ones Jesus has been sent to rescue? They are gathered into the barn.

All along we have been thinking about how to oppose evil without creating more evil and being made evil ourselves. There is a way but to see it will require a parable that twists in a manner we do not expect. What if Jesus were the weed we pulled out? We saw him as evil because he looked like a weed to us. In becoming human just like us; but born poor, from an obscure place, far from the center of power in a time of empire, he looked like all the common weeds human culture has destroyed since time began in its attempt to maintain a false peace that benefits those who have power. In allowing himself to become the weed we reject, he reveals the weedy-ness of the human culture, a culture that does cause much weeping and gnashing of teeth to those it rejects.

Matthew 11:12 is a strange verse, not in today's lectionary reading, that some argue is the interpretive key to Matthew. It reads "From the day of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force." Maybe those wishing to participate in the kingdom of heaven do join those the powerful reject and suffer violence with them. Isn't that what our Methodist missionary forbears did when they came to Bolivia and identified with the Indian people, particularly the women? Isn't that what Jesus did on the cross? He suffered human violence rather than inflict it. The gospels are clear that he could have inflicted it with legions of angels but then he would have become like us. Instead of retribution he offers forgiveness as we humans are in the process of murdering him. And then when he arose he didn't retaliate; he said "peace be with you" to his terrified disciples who expected retribution.

“How can we oppose evil without creating new evils and being made evil ourselves? We join Jesus in suffering it, all the while forgiving. That’s what Jesus did. He asks those of us who follow him to do the same. It’s the only thing I know that will stop the spread of evil. “Let anyone with ears listen!” Amen.