

**July 19, 2020
Christ the Servant, Reston
Pentecost 7
Matthew 13:24-30**

I once had a seminary classmate who had not one ounce of self doubt. It was both a blessing and a curse for him. This person knew – or at least believed with all his heart that he knew – what was right and what was wrong. Therefore he knew – or at least believed with all his heart that he knew – which people were right and which were wrong. And so, by extension, this classmate also knew – or at least believed with all his heart that he knew – which people were good and which people were bad.

And he knew all of this instantaneously. He could make decisions with a snap of the fingers. Bull sessions with him were frustrating because he could not discuss ... just argue his position until the other person backed down. He knew by instinct who he wanted to spend time with and who he didn't. You were either on his list or you weren't. He was very binary.

I don't often come across people who change their ways, especially when they are so set in their ways. But it happened with him. The seminary assigned him an internship in a place where almost everyone and everything fit his description of "bad." It was as if God had a sense of humor and dropped this guy right down in the midst of a neighborhood, into the middle of a community that – according to his understanding and instinct – was bad. The streets were dirty. The people were loud. And the children ran unsupervised up and down the sidewalk, causing all kinds of chaos. He could only imagine what went on in their homes. Indeed!!

Needless to say, he was upset. What good is a moral framework if you are going to set you down outside of it? During his first week of the internship he decided he couldn't hack it and would ask the seminary for a move and if they wouldn't grant him the move he would ... well ... just quit.

There he was stewing and fuming in the vicar's office of the church when all of a sudden a grungy looking group of teens came rattling down the sidewalk. As he watched out his window he wondered if it were a gang. As they got closer it became obvious they were coming right for the church. He thought, "Oh great! Now I have to deal with this." They pounded on the door. He ignored it. Then they pounded harder. Finally he went to the door – glass like the one we have at CTS. Keeping it locked he called out between the crack, "What do you want?" The one who appeared to be the "gang" leader said, "Hey, mister. We think we found your wallet down the street. Here it is." He felt his back pocket and, indeed, it was empty. He unlocked the door enough for them to slip it in to him. The "gang" waved as they left. He waved back and weakly muttered, "Thanks." Then he checked inside. The cash and credit cards were still all there.

He went back inside, rethought his urge to leave, and made a decision to stay. He is still a pastor today and will tell this story in sermons.

Today's gospel, too, tells a story about being challenged by something which hasn't been considered "good" or "acceptable" ... challenged by something considered even "bad" and "unacceptable." The parable that Jesus relates in Matthew tells of weeds that have been planted by an enemy in the midst of good seed. Terrible weeds ... deceitfully planted in the middle of the night by someone sabotaging the field that had been planted with good seed. The weeds can't be pulled without also uprooting the wheat. The householder commands that both grow together until harvest at which time they can be dealt with.

I've just told you two stories. The biblical one is about finding out that what one person considered "good" – the wheat – was contaminated by that which was considered "bad" – the weeds. But the story about my seminary classmate was about finding out that the field of weeds the seminary had sent him to was really wheat ... was really the harvest ... was really that which he wished to gather.

It's important, I think, to consider the different dimensions of “truth” in these stories. My classmate thought he knew the difference between wheat and weeds. He was certain of it. He believed with all his heart he could tell the difference. And he didn't want to be around that which he considered weedy. That is, until he was confronted with a different truth.

You and I aren't so different from my seminary classmate. If we are honest we will confess that there are people we don't like and we don't want to spend much time with them. Who chooses to go into situations where they feel uncomfortable? And think of the farmer in Matthew's parable whose field had been seeded with weeds by an enemy. The weeds have taken root and can't be uprooted without uprooting the very thing the farmer is trying to grow. So he shrugs and says, “Let them grow together until the harvest.”

Sometimes I think sermons hinge on one key verse in the text ... and I think it is this one: Let them grow together until the harvest. We live in a culture which seems intent on ripping out – weeding out – anything that is different. If it doesn't look like wheat it must be bad. Rip it out. If the other guy doesn't look like me, doesn't think like me, doesn't vote the way I do, well then that person has no place in my field. The way I look at the world is the right way. If someone else looks at the world another way, well then it must be the wrong way. If a speaker scheduled on campus is deemed insufficiently “correct” then let's cancel her talk. We don't want even to consider the other side. Truth is, we find ourselves in a field of diversity.

So, Matthew's parable presents us with a question: How do we deal with weeds? How do we confront differences of doctrine and opinion? Political differences? Sexual orientation differences? Are we sitting patiently by, waiting to root out that which is different? Are we taking note of the weeds and marking them for burning? For the Christian community of Matthew's day, that may have been needed. But I wonder if new times might be calling us to new fields and new

methods of farming. Could it be that we might – in today’s church – be a little more like my friend? Could we, in today’s Christian community, be in a place where we might need to hang out and see what’s going on before we bolt? Before we pull out the weeds and burn them?

Let me see if I can apply this to what’s happening in this church in this time. Three weeks ago we took a vote to become a part of the Reconciling in Christ circle of congregations which are accepting and welcoming of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, and those of other sexual orientations. Time was when such people would have been considered the weeds and the calls would have been to rip them out of the field and cast them into the outer darkness in which there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. But our vote was virtually unanimous. There were no “no” votes. One person abstained from voting

So now we are a congregation which is pretty united in seeing things in a progressive way. But what happens if there pop up among us some who beg to differ ... who don’t see the world the way we do ... who belong to the “other” political party? Will the temptation be to view such people as weeds among the rest of us who are wheat? Will we weed them out? Will they weed themselves out? Some already have. I think if we are going to raise a flag for diversity then we need to be accepting of those with a minority point of view. They, too, are on a journey and if they aren’t at the same place we are ... well ... it may just mean they haven’t gotten there yet.

Truth be told? God’s honest truth? WE are probably the weeds. We are the ones who fall far short of the glory of God. Will *we* be pulled up, gathered into a pile, and burned? Or will a loving and forgiving savior encourage us to grow together with others who are not at all like us? Do we have faith that one day we well ALL be gathered TOGETHER into a harvest to be laid at the feet of God in God’s harvest home? I have faith that is so. I think you do, too!