

**Lectionary 17 Year A 2020**  
**July 19, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel text this morning is a great example of what we call “apocalyptic writing”. In ancient society, the word “apocalypse” was a fairly standard, normal Greek word that meant “revelation or to reveal something”. However, today it has become shorthand to refer to “the end of the world” or “the end of the world as we know it.” We read in the news about apocalyptic predictions for the stock market or peace talks or the coronavirus, and how the world is going to end because of decisions that leaders are making.

When we look at apocalyptic writings, one of the primary features is that they talk about the end of the world. And a lot of this has to do with the communities for which these writings are created. Apocalyptic writings, including parables, are written by communities that are usually experiencing persecution. And this is exactly the case for the community for which Matthew was writing. He was likely writing for a community of Jewish Christians in a larger metropolitan city, and they were being persecuted by the Jewish authorities. But any community that believes it is being persecuted is likely to produce apocalyptic thinking and writing. These communities often feel like they are the “last generation”. They will be the ones who will see the world—or at least the world as they know it—truly end, they believe that they will see God, or some other power, finally and decisively act. These communities often have very strong identities of “us vs. them”.

We can see these qualities play out in our parable this morning. Jesus tells a story where there is a strong sense of “us”—the children of the light planted by the master, and “them”—the children of darkness planted by the enemy. In this parable, just like in Matthew’s community, the in-group feels as though they are being oppressed by “them” And Jesus says that only the reapers at the end of the age can make right the wrongs within the field or the wrongs within the world.

Apocalyptic thinking, along with the “us vs. them” mentality is alive and well today too. And it goes beyond our pop culture obsessions with movie, TV, and video game apocalypses. We can easily envision in this election year certain groups of people who feel oppressed, who feel like they are the last generation of humanity, like the end of the world is near, and who have a strong sense of “us vs. them”. In fact, we may be able to identify a time in our own lives when we’ve had apocalyptic mindset in relation to the events of the world.

This kind of thinking seems to be language of modern American politics. We set ourselves up with “us vs. them”, “children of the light” and children of darkness.” The children of the light are the ones who will vote for our candidate, the only candidate that will save America with strong and decisive action. The children of darkness, of course, are the ones who vote for the other candidate, the candidate that will finally and fully destroy America, the America that we grew up with and love. Both groups of course feel like they are being oppressed by their enemies, but instead of relying on God to act decisively to save them and change the world, they place their faith in a candidate, or a policy, or a political party or movement. Worse still, the sense of “us vs. them” is so strong in some of us that we cut the children of darkness, we cut “them”, out of our lives. We convince ourselves that we if we can just get rid of the weeds, the wheat will be able to flourish in peace.

I have a friend who never saw eye-to-eye with her family on politics. It doesn't matter who believes what, or who is on which side of which policy or debate. All that matters is that she and her family each believed the other was some kind of extremist, a child of darkness in our American political apocalyptic thinking. She was slowly and surely unfriended by her family on Facebook, first by her aunts and uncles, then by her cousins, and eventually she was even

unfriended by her parents and siblings. At every step of the way, at every lost connection, she says, to me, “Good. Now I won’t have to listen to *those* people anymore. I’m better without them.” Last year was the first time in several years that she wasn’t scheduled to work Thanksgiving day, but she was uninvited by her family to Thanksgiving dinner. “Good” she told me and she picked up an extra shift at work. But the truth is that she spent Thanksgiving evening alone eating a turkey sandwich, watching movies with her cats. She says she doesn’t care, but you can tell, that before all this “us vs. them”, American political apocalyptic thinking, they were a family that loved and cared for one another. You can tell, in tearing the “weeds” from her life she has lost a vital part of her roots and wellbeing.

This is what Jesus is talking about in his apocalyptic parable. His great wisdom is that we cannot tear out the weeds of this world without damaging the wheat as well. *We are all connected* in ways that we can’t truly understand or appreciate until those connections are broken. Our roots are intertwined, and as much as we might like to be separate and separable, plucking up the weeds damages or even destroys the wheat. We are all connected, and we all suffer when even one is uprooted, even one whom we believe, or are certain is a weed.

And the truth is that even as much as we might convince ourselves that we’re the wheat, that we’re the children of the light, it doesn’t always look that way. We’ve all done things or said things in our lives that make us appear more like weeds than like wheat. Our actions, or our words, or even our voting record cannot make us wheat. As much as we might think we’re wheat, on our own, we’re just as likely to be weeds as we are to be wheat. We cannot make ourselves wheat by our own actions. God has to do it for us. God declares that we are wheat, and makes it so.

In baptism we confess that we are children of a fallen humanity. We came into this world as weeds, but by water and the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that blew over the waters at creation, God makes us wheat. We become wheat because our God, a God of grace and mercy, of love and forgiveness, of relationships and wholeness desires it and declares it for us. This is the promise that comes to us in the waters of baptism, this is the Spirit! God makes us into children of light, not because we choose or believe rightly, not because we understand a secret truth, but because our God is one of mercy and grace, ready and willing to gift us with the salvation we can never earn.

So then, what about the weeds? What happens to “them”? Surely our God of justice has them destined for the fire, right? Well, maybe not. If our God, a God of justice and mercy, of forgiveness and relationships, of creation and re-creation, of wholeness and restoration saw fit to save us, who looked like weeds and were as good as dead, in baptism, then surely when the reapers have been through the field of this world, and the weeds have been bundled up, with a single word, our God, our mighty and loving God can turn every last weed into wheat. The same Spirit that descended to us at our baptism, that blew over the waters at creation, this Spirit can blow over the weeds of our world, the weeds of our lives, the weeds of ourselves and make them wheat.

And so, our God desires that we be in relationship with each other and with God. Our roots are intertwined with one another despite our differences. We are all connected. At the end of time, it is our relationships with God and one another, God’s goodness and mercy, God’s restoration and re-creation, that will win out. So on that harvest day, it won’t matter whether we feel like we are weeds or wheat. With a creative and redeeming word from our mighty, loving and merciful God, all of humanity and this whole creation will be saved. Thanks be to God. Amen.