

JULY 19, 2020

The parable of the wheat and the weeds... Another good one!

Quick story... I'm proud to say, our daughter, Jo married into a four-generation farm family from Eastern Washington State. Wheat farmers, they manage eleven thousand acres, big operation! And wonderful people!

About three years ago we were driving home from Seattle and went right by their place, and so we got a tour. Jo's father-in-law, Mark, drove us around to look at the crops. They do things differently out there. Different climate, different soil, different crops...

Mark is a firm believer in no-till, and he's always experimenting with different techniques and rotations. At the top of a low hill, he pulled over and we saw one continuous seven-hundred-acre field of wheat. You couldn't see the end of it!

Talk about amber waves of grain! Beautiful... And not a single weed anywhere. I asked him, "How do you do that?" He gave an explanation about fall planting, spring moisture, plant pressure... Made sense to me...

Then we got to see a field of yellow peas, and frankly, that didn't look so good... Lots of weeds... But I learned that peas are legumes and they fix nitrogen for next year's wheat. Mark was willing to put up with a few weeds as long as it *builds the soil...*

In that field it was easy to tell the difference between the peas and the weeds, and in most fields it usually is. But in our parable, that's not the case. The Greek word that is translated as "weeds" is *zizania*, which refer to a specific kind of weed called darnel, which is an annual grass that looks a lot like wheat and is slightly poisonous.

When the plants are young, it's virtually impossible to tell the difference. And it's only when the plants are mature that the grain of the wheat are heavy and will droop, while the grain of the darnel stand up straight. Well now, that changes things doesn't it...

The slaves notice the darnel, and their first response is to question the quality of the seed. The master replies that an enemy has sown the darnel, and the slaves are eager to get busy, they want to get out there and rid of those nasty weeds. But the master stops them, saying that in pulling up the darnel they would also uproot the wheat. So, it's not only difficult to tell the difference, but pulling up the darnel would cause more damage...

This parable emphasizes that it's hard to tell the difference between wheat and weeds. As appropriate, because sometimes it's also hard for us to tell the difference between good and evil.

The original sin with Adam and Eve, is that they ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The sin, is wanting to be like God, wanting to be the judge of all that is good and evil.

I heard a saying this week: When you try to fight the Devil, you wind up doing the Devil's work. That's the paradox and problem with evil. The more certain we are about the difference between good and evil, the more vulnerable we become to engaging in evil.

I'm a part of a Facebook group that is composed of ELCA clergy, it's a place for Pastors and Deacons to ask questions and exchange experiences. Sometimes it can get a little testy... And my goodness, I think the pandemic is taking its toll, last week was nothing short of disturbing.

The details aren't important, but what started as a little disagreement, grew into a firestorm that resulted in dozens of participants being kicked out of the group by the moderator! Lots of supposedly intelligent and compassionate people being intolerant of others... All wonderful people, and yet, all tragically human.

Original sin, being like God is a huge temptation. And still with us each and every day. Have you ever noticed how we consider ourselves to be the wheat, but those other people, not like us, we consider them to be the weeds?

I'm pretty sure the Democrats are convinced the Republicans are weeds, and of course vice versa... And we're in an election year, we're going to be bombarded with political ads all slamming each other... All claiming the other side is a pile of noxious weeds...

We all have our opinions about who are the wheat and who are the weeds... And so eager to start finger pointing, accusing, blaming-- the pulling of the weeds. And it leads nowhere, except down the path to all that weeping and gnashing of teeth. Kind of sounds like the state of our country these days... Lot's of weeping and gnashing of teeth...

When Jesus interprets the parable, he says we are to leave judgment to God. We are called to be the church in the midst of all this wheat and weeds, in all this good and evil. We are called to love one another. We are *even* called to love people we don't like.

And transformation happens when we dare to love someone who is different than our-self. I've talked about this before... I know this is hard... Transforming our original sin isn't easy... When Jesus says pick up your cross and follow me, this is where we're going. We don't crucify others to get what we want; we crucify ourselves to understand others, to love others. This is what builds the kingdom...

And frankly, this is an opportunity for the church. When everything in our culture seems to demand we take a stand and marginalize others, we are fundamentally a different voice. Make no mistake, we are called to discern issues, but we are called to do it in a loving way.

The good news is that this parable is a story of salvation. We are all saints and sinners. The good news is that Jesus will be our judge. Jesus does not teach that we will be lost; he teaches

that the part of us that is the sinner will one day be transformed in the holy fire of God's love. The Saint in all of us will be purified. And we will shine like the sun in the Kingdom...

This is our confession and our ministry. We are confident of God's love; the good seed is planted in our hearts. We will be the harvest that God collects. And so, as you are sent to go in peace and serve the lord, love your neighbors—especially the weedy ones... It builds the kingdom...

And let anyone with ears, listen...

Amen...