

**What To Do About the Mare’s Tails**

**July 23, 2017**

**Matthew 13, 24-30, 36-43**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the Good Gardener, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

I never knew planting a field was so complicated. At our new house, we have about 7 acres devoted to pasture for the alpacas. For many years the previous owners had leased out those acres to a local farmer. Last summer Farmer Chuck had planted soy beans and that was actually one of the hold ups for us being able to purchase the home. We had to wait for him to harvest the field last fall. All winter the alpacas ate hay and during that time nothing grew in the field. Come spring I asked Jack at the elevator what I should plant for the pasture. We researched on Google to find the proper mixture of different types of grasses because alpacas are known to be browsers. They like a variety in their salads… So, Jack mixed us up over 800 pounds of Blue grass, Orchard Grass, Rye Grass, and Timothy, as well as Oats. No weeds were allowed. I must have an enemy I’m not aware of because as all of that mixture germinated and began to grow up this summer I discovered I have something called Mare’s Tail growing all throughout the field. I’ve been advised not to let them go to seed because a single Mare’s Tail produces over 100,000 seed and will pretty soon take over the entire pasture. It looks like my only options are to mow everything before they go to seed or try to individually pull or treat each weed with a chemical herbicide. Neither option is good. Treating each weed will take hours and hours and mowing the field will also mow down the oats before they go to seed meaning I’ll have no oats for next year. Jesus sure picked a great analogy when he chose this for his parable to teach us about God’s Kingdom. There are no really good choices.

Today’s parable is like the parable of the sower from last week in that it’s also accompanied by an explanation written by Saint Matthew about 50 years after Jesus originally told the story. Matthew once again, just like last week’s parable, interpreted Jesus’ story in light of the audience he was addressing of his day. You can tell Matthew’s interpretation is different from the meaning Jesus originally intended for the parable because the outcome of the weeds is totally different. Jesus said the reapers would collect the weeds and bundle them up to be used as fuel in the winter. When Matthew interpreted the parable he told his audience the angels would collect all the causes of evil and evil doers (the weeds) and throw them into the fire where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In the original version Jesus told, the weeds were bundled up and saved. They were of use to the gardener, but for Matthew the weeds were simply evil and had to be destroyed.

So, what are we to make of this parable, this teaching of our Lord for us in today’s world? Well, after thinking about this text over the week, and with the insight of the various commentaries I read, I have come to believe the true point of the parable has something to do with the desire of the servants to go out and up root the weeds. The landowner says, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.”

Think about the historical context in which Jesus spoke this parable. There were various sects or philosophies in Judaism and each sect was striving to create a pure community of faith. The Pharisees strove to be pure in all their actions, to uphold God’s law, and were very critical of the more common people, who may not have been as exuberant about the law of Moses as they were. These were the persons who chastised Jesus for his association with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. To the Pharisees, the people Jesus associated with were the weeds of society, which needed to be ignored, if not uprooted from society all together. Then, there were the Essenes, who lived an isolated life in community with each other. These were the people who lived in the wilderness down near the Dead Sea. Thanks to their cult, we have preserved for us today what we call the Dead Sea Scrolls. To them, mainline Judaism was the embodiment of the devil. They may not have been able to remove the weeds, so they removed themselves from society instead, and considered all who didn’t join them to be weeds.

I can think of several groups today who might fit this category… Perhaps some Muslims, some Baptists, or some of the more Fundamentalist Christian Denominations, and even some Missouri Synod Lutherans might be among those who today try to keep themselves and their religion pure and undefiled by the weeds. How about the Amish who try to stay totally isolated from the rest of society? I’m not sure they think we’re weeds to be eliminated, but they certainly don’t want to mingle together either.

In Jesus’ day there were both weeds and those who either wanted to remove the weeds or stay apart from them and it seems to me, nothing has changed today. This brings up the possibility that we might be the persons to whom this parable is addressed. We might be the servants who want to uproot the weeds before the harvest. We might be the ones, that because of our limited vision, fail to see, not only the patience of God in dealing with the weeds of society, but also the beauty in the weeds, which the redeeming grace of God is able to recover. Thus, the message of this parable may be telling us to be patient in our judgement of others, and wait for the harvest, because God may have a surprise for us. Those whom we might think are a detriment to our society of the faithful, may well become fuel to warm the heart of God.

By now you know me well enough to know I never let these stories become that simple. There’s always a twist. Perhaps this parable is a story about Jesus himself, and his patience in living among the weeds of our world. There are plenty of us who might think of ourselves as nothing but weeds. Some people see no value in their lives. This is not how Jesus treats people! Jesus went out of his way to spend a lot of time with those on the fringe of society, the outcasts and known sinners of his day. Even his chosen disciples were not considered to be the elite of society, by any means. They were common folk, who never dreamed they might become some of the most influential witnesses to the grace of God, let alone people God would use to change the world. That’s just what God did and the kind of people God goes out of His way to find and use—the weeds of society. Through the grace God, a bunch of weeds became the first disciples, the fuel that warmed the heart of God, through their witness.

This parable, as Jesus actually told it, speaks vividly to us today. It tells us even though there may be those who would have us believe we might be worthless, God sees value in our lives. God can use you, no matter how worthless you feel or how worthless you’ve been told you are. God will go out of his way to find you and nurture you and use you to become his servant for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of the world God loves.

Before I leave this parable for another three years, I want to make a couple of points. Please notice it’s the enemy who plants the weeds. Bad things are never, never God’s plan or idea. Pain and death in our lives are not there because God has some grand plan or because God needs another angel in heaven. Evil is planted by the enemy. You can call evil the devil, Satan, or just bad luck, but please don’t attach responsibility to God. God’s only plan for you is for good and not evil. Lastly, let’s leave the final judgment up to God. Personally, I’m glad the decision to pull or kill the weeds isn’t mine to make. All I have to worry about is taking care of my little piece of God’s creation. Which brings me back full circle to where I started. Whether it’s Mare’s Tail or just evil in general, leaving the harvest up to God is hard. We want to take action, any action, but God says just scatter seeds and leave the harvesting up to Him. That’s where Kingdom work and my work at PJ’s Paca paradise differ. I’ve got to do something about my weeds, but in the Kingdom of God only God decides what to do about the weeds.

As we serve our Lord, may God’s Spirit give us patience in judging others, as Jesus had in judging us. As we live among the weeds may God use us to nurture and sustain the wheat until the time of His harvest. May God bless us with His grace turning us weeds into His beautiful flowers. Amen!