

Pentecost VIII - Kiona Lookingbill

July 23, 2023

On Matt 13:24-30 - Wheat & Darnel

Good morning!

I hope you are enjoying your summer.

Summer is a time of growth and, with the recent rains, we have had *a lot* of growth in our backyard. After a good rainfall, I go out looking for weeds because grass is the desired vegetation in our backyard and weeds are easier to take out when the soil is wet and soft. It is key that you get the entire root out unless you want those pesky things to come back.

Now there are weeds that are easy to pull out. You trace the weed along the stem down to just above the root and give it a good tug: Out comes the entire thing. Then there are weeds like clover. Not only do I have a hard time getting to their roots but, once you start pulling at them, the grass comes out with it, so there are quite a few times I had given up on weeding them out in order to save the grass!

Today's Gospel passage talks about a farmer allowing wheat and weeds to grow together. Now, what kind of a farmer does that? Weeds are not the desired product, so, of course, this makes no sense at first glance. And I imagined that the weeds in the parable do the same thing clover does: That their root system gets interlocked with those of the wheat and so they are not pulled out to save the wheat!

But, it turns out, there is an even more compelling reason these weeds in the parable are allowed to stay: This weed was known to the listeners back in the days of Jesus and has a name: 'Darnel.' Not only does this weed get entangled with the wheat but its blades look exactly the same as the wheat's! It is a 'mimic weed,' indistinguishable from the real thing—the wheat—so you *can't* get it out! The only time you could tell wheat from darnel, which is also known as 'false wheat,' is when it produces fruit—the grain. Wheat would get heavy and bow its head while darnel is light and stands up. Wheat grains are large and turn a golden brown; darnel seeds are smaller and a grayish color.

Another thing about darnel: It has an intoxicating effect on the one who consumes it. It messes with your vision and speech, and can cause hallucinations; a large dose of this can kill a person. Darnel is poison. If darnel were to get harvested along with the wheat and ground into flour, it would ruin that batch for it is not proper food but a narcotic.

So, back in Jesus' days, in the agricultural society that He and His contemporaries lived in, sowing darnel seeds onto a freshly tilled field sown with wheat seeds was one way of getting back at someone, and this type of revenge was a punishable crime.

This parable of Jesus provides a very concise *theodicy*—the explanation of good and evil. The reason for the presence of evil is explained: There is an Enemy of God, who is responsible for the evil among us. Like Jesus, who sows seeds of goodness and has children of the Kingdom, Satan sows seeds of His own and has his own followers.

It also tells us what realities doers of good will face: Opposition—from Satan and the 'darnels' of this world.

Jesus, the Son of God, who came to do God's will, in His own time on earth, had opposition coming from Herod, who tried to kill baby Jesus by ordering a massacre on all infants; He had opposition from people of His own town; opposition from the Pharisees and the scribes, whom John the Baptist called a 'brood of vipers;' and He had opposition from Satan Himself.

You, in your walk with God, may and should have, according to this parable, encountered much opposition and have had your fair share of encounters with the 'darnels' of the world: Racists, sexists, oppressors, murderers; people who willfully deprive others, people lacking compassion for their fellow human beings, people who have a great facade but are toxic and oppose people who do good... Did you not wonder why there is hindrance and even opposition, when you are trying to do the right thing? Well, this parable explains it. This parable answers the psalmist's cry, "Why, Lord, do evildoers prosper while the righteous suffer?" Haven't you also wondered what God is doing when innocent people—especially children—suffer? Because of the presence of evil among us.

The darnels of the world live among us and take up space, they take land and nourishment that is meant for God's children—oftentimes, quite literally! During the time of the Prophet Isaiah, God gave this warning to people who disregarded His will for equity and greedily took more land than they should have:

"Woe to those who join house to house,
who add field to field,

until there is room for no one,
and you are left to live alone
in the midst of the land!" (Isaiah 5:8)

Back in the Days of Saint Basil the Great, there were people who "let grain rot in [their] barns and [did]n't feed the starving; [who hid] gold in the earth but ignore[d] the oppressed."

Just two centuries ago, the Prophet of San Francisco, Henry George, wrote in his monumental work *Progress & Poverty* how landlords squeeze rent out of workers until they turn them into modern-day slaves.

Back in the late 90's, I came across statistics that said that less than 5% of the U.S population owned over 90% of the ownable land in this country.

This parable paints a picture of theodicy that makes a lot of sense on so many levels. If there is anything God-ordained about evil, it is that He allows it to exist...

... *but* only up to a certain point. God will have evil weeded out at 'the End of the Age.' He is not going to allow the weeds to enter His eternal Kingdom. For the rampant growth of the darnels of the world, there is a 'deadline' in the truest sense of the word, for they will be taken out and will not be included in the Kingdom of God; and I don't know about you but for me, the absence of God—the Creator, the Light of the World, the Giver of Life—is probably worse than death.

I believe Jesus told this parable, not to have us point fingers, segregate, or try to weed out the evildoers. It is clear that the weeding and harvesting will be done by God's Angels, not us. We are not to judge; Christ will do that. And, I deem that some who act like wheat might end up being dandel, and some who look like dandel now might end up being wheat! For Jesus Himself said, not all who call Him, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We shall discover who's who at the End of Days when Jesus Christ "judge[s] the living and the dead."

I believe that this story is given to us so that, first of all, we would do introspection and self-examination. We need to think, "Am I a wheat or weed, Lord?" Sort of like the disciples who were told about the traitor amongst them and responded, "Is it I, Lord?" For as we see in the Pauline scriptures, even the Apostle Paul had these internal battles within himself that, basically, sums up as: "I do the things I don't want to do." As the Russian writer Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (Солженицын) wrote:

"the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with

the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains... an un-uprooted small corner of evil. "

Even in our hearts, there is a battle between the wheat and the weeds.

So, what are we to do? For us who are on the path toward sanctification, we need to constantly choose to be children of Light and be doers of the will of God (Matt 7:21). For that, we need a lot of help from our 'Farmer.' We need to drink from the Living Water that only Jesus can provide—Water that will not make us thirsty again. We need to look upwards to God and face the bright Light of the World in order to thrive. We need to remain in good soil, the Word of God, and pray for assistance from the Holy Spirit so that we may bear the fruit of the Spirit.

I also believe this parable was given to us as an encouragement. Our suffering in this world is only for a while is "not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18), when, at the End of Days, the righteous will "shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."

Now, that is something worth looking forward to! So, take heart and persevere in doing good, and be encouraged in your walk with Our Lord!

Amen.