

"Good and evil"

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday July 19, 2020

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

²⁴ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸ He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen! (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

How many of you enjoy gardening?

The parable of Jesus' last week and this week are about big fields- and farmers who plant and grow things.

Now, I don't know how good advice Jesus is giving to would-be farmers, his being a carpenter. But I do know Jesus was particularly gifted as a teacher and the expert on the things of the kingdom of heaven.

This morning in the parable the soil is all good for growing.

And according to Jesus he sows good seed in the world, he sows his word in his people and they begin to grow.

But then the enemy of Jesus, the devil came at night and planted his own seed, and sin also started to grow in the world.

The picture is of people who do good, and are children of God, living next to people who do evil, and are children of the devil.
We see the truth of Jesus' parable – good and evil exist in our world and exist in our churches.
Jesus doesn't tell us as much about the evil of this world as we'd like to know.
But the parable does tell us a few things – first, note that God doesn't plant the evil.
It is God's enemy the devil who plants the evil in the world.
Second, we note that the devil doesn't do anything to the wheat – he plants a poor copy of the wheat – weeds that unfortunately resemble the wheat.

Notice also that the enemy doesn't have to do much to throw everything into confusion.
He comes at night, plants his weeds and is gone...

The servants of the Master are very concerned about this situation.
Their question is; "where do the weeds come from when you planted good/clean seed?"
Their question is like ours, where does evil come from?

The answer is simple, evil comes from the devil, from the enemy of God.
Jesus offers no more details.

So the next, and probably more important question is what do we do with evil?
Evil in the world, evil in the good soil in our community, even evil in the church; what do we do with it?
Do we try to tear it out?
The Master's answer is "no" for by trying to get rid of the weeds, you will surely destroy some of the wheat also, for the wheat and the weeds look very similar until the end.

TARES Look IDENTICAL To WHEAT



WHEAT: before it is fully ripe.

TARES: Lolium Temulentum

Who are the good guys and who are the bad guys,
in the church, and in the world?
It's not so easy to tell, especially as they grow up
side by side.

That is one of the great truths of the gospel.
We have seen enough evangelists and church leaders who appeared to be the good guys, who are found out to be charlatans, and hypocrites, stealing money from the poor to line their own pockets.

And we've seen enough bad guys repent, and come to faith, to know that's it's not over until it's over.

If you've been in a church for a couple of years probably you've seen some very un-Christian behavior.

And some of the people who seemed least likely, turned out to be some of the most faithful and trustworthy in the long run.

But notice also that Jesus takes evil very seriously.

Jesus doesn't want any of the wheat torn up, and so he puts up with the weeds, but the day is coming when God will bring judgment.

The angels will be sent out to gather the weeds, so that they might be burned, and the wheat will be gathered into the barns.

Jesus' comment about those who are sent to the fires is that there will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth, which we might translate as much whining, crying and regret.

And let those who have ears, listen.

So where do you find yourself in this parable?

Probably most of us can relate to the servants of the Master, noticing that there is much evil and good growing together in the church pews, and in the world in general.

And so the word to us is patience, and the assurance that we are not qualified to judge.

But there is also the promise that God will send forth those who will judge rightly, judgment is assured.

But the troubling question is are we wheat or weeds?

What is the harvest you see in your life?

If we're honest, most of us see both sin and righteousness, faithfulness and faithlessness, we know that we are chief among sinners, and yet we are forgiven by Jesus.

Jesus is about to teach several other parables to the disciples, at the end of the teaching he asks them if they stand-under this word, is it understood, and if the disciples will continue to follow where Jesus leads.

They answer "yes" – they are wheat growing up, bearing fruit; they are disciples of Jesus.

But Peter, the rock will stumble and deny Jesus, the others will flee at the persecution, all will wonder and question if Jesus was the Messiah of God at his death.

They are disciples, and still they fall, still they seek the grace and love of Jesus to forgive them, still they make mistakes, but still they follow Jesus some days marching, other days limping, some days sighing, other days dancing, and many days Jesus carries them.

Jesus called them, Jesus began a good work in them, and if they continue following where Jesus' leads, Jesus will complete his good work in them that he might present them holy and blameless before his Father in Heaven.

To the Colossian Church, Paul wrote:

²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

²³ But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

(Col 1:21-23)

God is going to deal with evil – evil in the world and evil within us...

Tom Long in his commentary on this passage says;

“the promise of this parable is that God will finally not tolerate anything that deadens humanity or corrupts God's world. Whatever is in the world, or in us, that poisons our humanity and breaks our relationship with God will, thank the Lord, be burned up in the fires of God's everlasting love.”

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Thanks be to God!

Prayer After: God of grace, thank you that you sow good seed in our lives and in our world. Thank you that evil does not confound you, nor does it hamper the growth of your kingdom. Thank you that you hold judgment in your hand. Amen.