

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 “The F.R.O.G. System” 3/12/23

Greyhound racing is a popular sport in some parts of the country - It attracts crowds who enjoy watching the sleek and beautiful dogs run as fast as they can around a track

Personally, I have known several who have had greyhounds as pets – Many are available because they retire from racing after three or four years - They are great pets, usually very gentle - But despite being able to run super-fast, they are one of the laziest dogs around

But, as far as racing goes, I’m more the Wall Stadium type - And I cannot even tell you where to find a greyhound track - So this illustration comes straight out of my Hot Illustrations book

Unlike racehorses, greyhounds run without the assistance of a jockey - To keep the dogs running in the right direction, they are trained to chase a mechanical rabbit made of fur as it zips along the track in front of them

A man in the control box electronically keeps the speed of the rabbit just fast enough to keep out in front of the dogs - The dogs never catch it

At a Florida track some years back, a big race was about to begin - The dogs crouched in their cages, ready to go, while betting spectators finished placing their wagers - At the proper moment, the gun went off

The man in the press box pushed his lever, starting the rabbit down the first stretch, while the cage doors flew open, releasing the dogs to take off after the little rabbit

As the rabbit made the first turn, however, an electrical short in the system caused the rabbit to come to a complete stop, to explode, and to go up in flames

Their rabbit gone, the bewildered dogs did not know how to act - According to news reports, several dogs simply stopped running and laid down on the track, their tongues hanging out

Two dogs, still frenzied with the chase, ran into a wall - Another dog began chasing his tail, while still others howled at the people in the stands - Not one dog finished the race<sup>1</sup>

Life in this world is all too often like a greyhound race - And the humans are the greyhounds - Too many spend all their lives, all of their energy, chasing something they never attain

Then, the moment we feel like we are just about to catch that prize - We discover that the mechanical rabbit we are chasing just speeds up

In addition, as those dogs in Florida discovered - Perhaps we discover that all our energy is being expended on something that turns out to be worthless

Today, in our Lenten journey through some of Jesus' parables, we heard one of Jesus' that speaks strongly to those of us living our lives like we are trapped in a greyhound race - Always chasing something that we cannot obtain

That is because life in this world all too often like being a stalk of wheat in a field of weeds - I cannot quote any sociological study, but personally it feels like I am constantly surrounded by selfish people, the weeds of the earth - And behind the wheel of a car, selfishness seems to be tripled - It seems like the weeds are spreading, too, even choking out the wheat

As faithful followers, selfishness is not an option - Philippians 3:3-4 commands us, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others"<sup>2</sup>

In today's parable, Jesus shares the message that even if we spend our entire lives trapped in a field of weeds - We will see a glorious reward where "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hot Illustrations, © 2001, (Youth Specialties, El Cajon, CA)

<sup>2</sup> from: Matthew 13:43 - Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, © 2001 by Crossway (Good News Publishing, Wheaton, IL),

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 13:43a

Yet, despite the wonderful reward that God has prepared for those who accept His Son - The Good News is so much more than just hope for the future - It is real hope for us today as well

The parable of the weeds is the second farming parable, in this chapter of Matthew and here during Lent in worship - The first was the parable of the sower, considered in my message two Sundays ago

The parable of the weeds in the field loses something in its translation into the English language - Because the word weeds is certain to bring to mind any number of disagreeable plants in our gardens

But when we explore the original Greek, we discover that the word translated weeds is "zizania" which is a particular type of weed

This is important because as a zizania grows, it is nearly impossible to tell it from wheat - Once mature, the wheat has kernels of wheat - But the zizania has seeds that would poison the flour if milled together with the wheat

Therefore, something that would have been totally obvious to someone in the early Church reading this parable in the original Greek - Is nearly hidden to those of us who speak and read English

It is the fact that the wheat and the weeds are nearly impossible to tell apart - As we look around us, the same goes for people - Someone may look like a Christian, a nice stalk of wheat, but that person may not be

Or someone may look like a weed, the last person we would expect to know Jesus; but that person could have a wonderfully strong faith

Years ago, when our daughter Melanie was entering high school, she and I interviewed at a Christian school - It had been highly recommended by a colleague who must not have had much experience with that school

At the interview, my daughter was modestly dressed, with no bare shoulders or cleavage showing and a skirt that was about knee length

I had a tie on, but was also wearing sneakers - Which is comes as no surprise to those of you who know me

When we arrived, it was obvious that we were out of place - The people there were in what I can only describe as the Fundamentalists' uniform - All the women had floor length dresses, their hair done the exact same way, and very plain shoes - Their men probably did not even own something as casual as a pair of sneakers

In the interview, the school's headmaster expressed doubt that a United Methodist could know Jesus - And they declined to admit Melanie to their school because she could not put an exact date and time on when she accepted Jesus as her Savior

They were wrong, of course - I know for a fact that United Methodists can know Jesus - And Melanie not only knew Jesus as her Savior then, but she was blessed because the fundamentalists turned us away

That school thought we were weeds - But we are actually wheat - She ended up in Baptist High School in Haddon Heights, which proved to be an excellent Christian school, and a great experience for her

Like the servants in the parable, we sometimes think that we can tell the weeds from the wheat - And that we should be busy yanking the weeds out of the garden - However, when we are tempted to do so, we should remember Jesus' caution that if we try, we will pull out good wheat with the weeds we try to remove

Instead of trying to weed out those who do not belong in the Lord's garden - It would be much more appropriate to treat everyone equally - Because we really cannot tell the weeds from the wheat, the lost from the saved

Additionally, the lost need to be treated well, if they are ever going to get to know Jesus - Makes sense - If we were to be harsh and unloving to those following the ways of the world - How well might they respond if we next try to tell them about Jesus?

Instead, it would be much wiser to follow the advice of Jesus - In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be (children) of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."<sup>4</sup>

An ancient Chinese story tells of a farmer who had one old horse that he used for tilling his fields - One day the horse escaped into the hills and when all the farmer's neighbors heard about it, they sympathized with the old man over his bad luck

"Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?" said the farmer.

A week later, the horse returned with a herd of wild horses from the hills and this time the neighbors congratulated the farmer on his good luck

"Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?" said the farmer.

Then, when the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off its back and broke his leg - Everyone agreed that this was very bad luck

Not the farmer, who replied, "Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?"

Some weeks later, the army marched into the village and forced every able-bodied young man to go fight in a bloody war - When they saw that the farmer's son had a broken leg, they let him stay - Everyone was very happy at the farmer's good luck.

"Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?"<sup>5</sup>

Life is a lot like that - Sometimes things are going well, and at other times, things go very badly - To borrow Jesus' imagery, all too often we are just a few stalks of wheat in a field of weeds

The hope in our parable today is that it will not always be like that - One day the harvest will come - And with it will come our eternal reward

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:43-

<sup>5</sup> Hot Illustrations, © 2001, (Youth Specialties, El Cajon, CA)

Yet, our faith is so much more than just a promise of a fantastic reward in the end - Our faith also includes a relationship with God

This is the same God who promised, in Isaiah 40:30-31 that, "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

The strength of our Faith is that no matter how bad life in this world gets - Even if we feel like we are surrounded by weeds - God is right there with us - Ready to renew our strength - And help us walk through any situation

Finally, getting to the mystery title of this message, "The F.R.O.G. System" - The answer is simple - Frog is an acronym for Fully Rely On God - In those tough times that this world seems to dish out all too often - We are to remember King David's words, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." - That's Psalm 124:8

No matter how tough things get - We are called to fully rely on God - And in so doing, we will find real hope for today

Even in those times when we are in a field of wheat so grand that we must be in our country's mid-west - And everything is going well, fantastic even - We are still to take everything to the Lord in prayer - Praising God, in those good times, for every good and perfect gift

So go fourth today rejoicing in the Lord who loves each of us - And is always ready to help us bear the burdens of this world