**Let Them Be For Now**

**Cooke’s-Portsmouth**

**July 19, 2020**

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

When I first looked at this parable I thought that that perhaps this parable might be the closest thing to reality that we have. Good and evil have coexisted since the earliest of times. Our Judeo-Christian history is rife with examples: Adam and Eve had the wily serpent; Jesus had Judas. Jesus also had the tempter/Satan to spar with. Othello had Iago. Scripture and literature are replete with examples of good and the opposite to good and their respective existence and influence. Good and evil and good seed and bad seed have lived side by side forever. The wisdom comes in knowing how to acknowledge this truth, and perhaps more importantly, how best to live with it.

Once again we have a parable about a sower. Last week we were reminded that the sower intentionally threw good seed into places where the germination was not a certainty, but seeds were sown in hope that there could be growth even in those soils that were far from perfect. This week there is something a little more intentionally sinister at play: A sower planted good seeds.

Weeds have been intentionally strewn among the wheat that puts the ideal harvest the sower had imagined at risk. Ideally, the servants could just rip out the weeds, but the sower knows that to tear out the weeds now risks ruining the maturing wheat as well. And so the sower must wait, living with both the wheat and the weeds until the day of harvest when they may be separated in due time.

Elisabeth Johnson has written that a bit of botany is helpful in understanding this parable. The weed that Matthew most likely refers to is darnel or cockle, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and real wheat is evident only when the plants mature and the ears appear. The ears of the real wheat are heavy and will droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight.

When the householder's slaves notice the weeds, their first response is to question the quality of the seed. "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" (13:27) When the master replies that an enemy has sown the weeds, the slaves are anxious to take care of the problem, to root those nasty weeds right out. But the master restrains his servants, saying that in gathering the weeds they would uproot the wheat along with them. He orders them to let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time it will be obvious what is wheat and what is weed. The wheat will be harvested and stored as grain in barns and the weeds will be gathered together in bundles and burned. Then he will send out his reapers to collect and burn the weeds and to gather the wheat into his barn

Perhaps there were some overzealous "weeders" in Matthew's congregation who wanted to purify the community by rooting out the bad seed. This seems to be a temptation for followers of Jesus in every age. We whip ourselves into a weeding frenzy, certain that we know the difference between weeds and wheat, and that we know how to deal with the weeds!

Jesus' parable makes clear that any attempt to root out the weeds will only do more damage to the crop. This has played out far too many times in congregations and denominations, with some determined to root out anyone who does not agree with the "right" interpretation of Scripture, liturgical practice, or stand on a particular issue. There are also those who pronounce judgment on people outside the church -- on people of other faiths, for instance -- declaring them to be destined for eternal damnation. Whether judgment is focused within the church or without, it does serious damage to the church and its mission. Leave the wheat and the weeds together, for now.

Is this a parable about patience? Is this a parable that reminds us that God alone can truly judge between good and evil? I spent Canada Day at my daughter’s and as I made my way from an upper deck to a lower area I became aware of how good the air smelled. I was readily transported back in my imagination to church camp where the woods smelled clean and fresh. Since then I have noticed the fragrance of the linden tree in my front yard as it blossoms and produces the seeds of ongoing creation. I sat with a neighbour on my back deck and noticed again how clean the air smelled. Say what you want about living with the reality of pandemic, the air smells cleaner and fresher with people driving less, and sitting more quietly and observing more because of the less hectic pace with which we are living. The question looms as to how we will conduct ourselves as citizens of the world if this pandemic is ever quelled.

Will it be business as usual or will we choose to retain some of the lessons, practices and observances gleaned while living with restrictions? Will we retain a slower pace and discern just how important it is to go somewhere? The thing is, you see, that we don’t live in an ideal world and each week we’re faced with a myriad of challenging decisions, some small and others large, to which there is no clear answer. Some decisions we’ll get right, others wrong, and still others we may not know whether we were right or wrong for months or years to come. But decisions still need to be made and good and that which is counter to good will continue to be at play.

Like postponing retirement to continue to try and be an effective presence in a challenging time; or walking away and washing one’s hands of any responsibility

Or drafting protocols for gathering together to maximize safety and trusting that these protocols will be integrated into a new way of being to maximize security and safety- not just for ourselves- but for everyone. Or sidestepping hand washing and sanitizing to save time and money.

Or building bigger barns to horde rather than sharing the resources that we have amassed. We all want to save for a rainy day or are held prisoner by memories of living through times of want so that we close our fists more tightly on what we have rather than risking sharing it and trusting that God will richly bless the risks that we take.

Or opting to take no treatment for a diagnosed illness which would probably only cause added suffering and not prolong life. Sometimes to do nothing demands a great deal from our hearts and souls.

Our lives are punctuated with situations where there is no clear or easy answer; situations where good and the counterpoint to good are in conflict.

But in this parable is the reminder that in challenging situations we have the promise that, in the end, God will sort things out. Which doesn’t mean everything will turn out just fine. Sometimes we don’t choose well. Sometimes things go wrong. The promise here isn’t that Christian faith prevents hardship; the promise is that we are not justified by our right choices but rather by grace through faith. Let it be for now and allow for the wisdom and compassion of grace to intercede, separate out and judge the wheat from the weeds. Let it be, for now.

The parable of the sower who sowed seeds in both certainty and in hope from last week may be the more inspiring one. It is awesome to think of the heroes of the faith who have seen the potential for growth in the less than desirable places. Who have made a significant difference in the name of faith and will live on in history. But the parable of the wheat and the tares may demand more of us in its call to patience; allowing the weeds and the wheat to coexist until such a time when there can be no mistaking the two.

We cannot always tell what is a good plant and what is a weed.

There is a story told by a teaching paediatrician at a major medical school who had followed 6 young teenagers with juvenile diabetes. Most of them had been diagnosed since they were toddlers and had grown up following strict diets, regimens, and giving themselves injections. The problems began when they were teenagers who did not want to stand apart from the crowd because of their disease. They ate what the gang ate, and forgot to take their insulin and were routinely brought in to emergency in shock or in a coma. It was frightening and frustrating for parents and dangerous for the patients. It was brought to the attention of the teaching paediatrician who was the associate director of the juvenile diabetes clinic. The operative word to retain is “associate.”

The doctor had a simple solution. She split the teens and parents into two groups consisting of three patients with the parents of the other three. Each group met to talk weekly.

The groups turned out to be quite powerful. Kids who could not talk to their own parents became articulate in expressing their needs and perspectives to the other parents. Parents who could not listen to their own children hung on the every world of the other children. And the other children could hear from other parents what they could not listen to from their own. Patients and parents each felt understood for the first time, and trusted that tears would be received and comforted. People of all ages offered support and insight and behaviours and attitudes began to change. Parents and their own children began to talk and listen to each other in new ways. Great progress was being made in the quality of all family relationships. The trips to the emergency room were diminishing, and it was win/win physically and emotionally and then the actual director of the clinic heard about the groups.

The associate director was criticized and reprimanded for her insight and handling of the situation. Since she was not a psychiatrist she was judged for working outside of her discipline, and even though no one had been hurt and the results were positive, the groups were disbanded.

This story illustrates two points for us. First, that sometimes it is insightful to step outside of the box of conventions and try a different application to get results. To do this is to emulate the carpenter from Galilee and to likewise model. “You have heard it said, but I say. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it is a reminder of how ill equipped some of us are to differentiate between the wheat and the weeds. In addressing the situation by splitting up parents from their children both patient and parent benefitted. Things could be heard that would not have been taken seriously if it was spouted one more time by an exasperated mother who thinks she knows best what her child needs, or posed by a defiant child who resented their diagnosis and how it made them different in a time and place when conformity was paramount. But the director was blind to the results and worried most about the infracting of protocols and change in strategy. The wisdom of Jesus stands. “Let the wheat and the weeds grow together until harvest when a more discerning eye will prevail and the good seed will go into the barn and the weeds into the fire.”

May God grace us with news eyes for seeing and patience to wait and see. Amen.