

**JULY 19, 2020 WE REGATHER FOR SERVICES OUTDOORS**  
**8 AND 10:30 FOR MASS ON THE GRASS**

**PENTECOST 7 (PROPER 11A) MEDITATION**                      **JULY 19, 2020**

Dear Friends,

The lessons for our Regathering Sunday with the first in-person worship since March 8, 2020 are meant to be a comfort to us just as they were to the folks who first listened to the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The writer is proposing that we learn to live well alongside of the weeds that may have purposely been planted to corrupt our garden.

How often do we not face dilemmas with not clear answers, questions about right and wrong or about the multitude of difficult choices we must make: like between getting a job or staying at home for child care, or supporting someone who constantly struggles at work pulling down his team or letting him go; or between choosing the best school you've been accepted to or one that is more affordable; or between two different treatment options in responding to a serious illness?

Especially now during such uncertainty about the future of our job security, the education of our children, eldercare, preventing COVID-19, in who or what do we find our rest and peace. The message is that even though our lives are littered with tough situations, we have the promise that, in the end, God will sort things out.

God loves us as wheat and weeds and it's a good thing since we are both, and. In the end, be assured that the reason Jesus spends so much time explaining the kingdom of heaven is because we need to be reminded that it's there even when it seems so excruciatingly absent. The promise of the parable is that even when the kingdom is not seen, it is near. That's a promise we all need to hear.

*With a love both powerful and patient, O God you sustain the growth of the good seed your Son has planted. Let your word like a mustard seed, bear rich fruit within us, and like a little yeast, produce its effects throughout the whole church. Thus may we dare to hope that a new humanity will blossom and grow to shine like the sun in your kingdom when the Lord of the harvest returns at the end of the age. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with*

*you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.  
From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year A, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.*

Faithfully, Beverly

## **PENTECOST 7 PATHWAYS**

**JULY 19, 2020**

**LESSONS:** ISAIAH 44:6-8; PSALM 86:11-17; MATTHEW 13:24-30-36-43

### **COLLECT**

*Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

### **GROANING**

Engines straining also groan. If you try to drive-up Mt. Washington Auto Road in NH, your engine may groan all the way to stop. The road climbs 4,618 feet (1,408 m) from an altitude of 1,527 feet (465 m) at the bottom to 6,145 feet (1,873 m) at the top, an average gradient of 11.6% up to 22%. That's steep.

This is the sound of creation. Groaning is the sound of creation. This is a vivid image. Perhaps it isn't such a fantastic metaphor for women who have actually experienced labor pains, but it reminds us of the difficult work of creation. That work can be hard. That work can be groan-inducing.

Groaning happens in a gap – a gap between what we are trying to do and what we hope to do. Groaning reminds us that the time spent in the gap between what is and what could be is a place of hard work.

Many today talk about the gap that we are experiencing: the gap between pre-coronavirus and post-coronavirus when there's an acceptable vaccine, what was and what we hope will be again. Before the pandemic shut-down, we could grieve the loss of a loved one at their bedside all the way to their burial. Before the pandemic, we had careers and plans and dreams that were crushed by the world health emergency. There are losses to speak of and work on.

The Prophet Isaiah offers God's words of comfort to the Judean exiles in the sixth-century BCE Babylon as they cope with the gap created by their exile. They were living in the gap between what was and what they faced in a foreign land in the hope of release and return. Isaiah's words encourage a marginalized religious minority to embrace and reclaim the dignity of their own traditions. They seek to rekindle dreams of deliverance among an oppressed people who have given up hope.

The gospel parable also speaks to life in the gap. The Reign of God – a reign that Jesus preached was here and now – is described as glorious. Jesus compares it to a grain field. A field of grain is the source of not just one loaf of bread, but an abundance of bread. This is an image of an abundance of what was, and for many still is, the basic food, the basic source of life.

Yet, in the midst of this vision of an abundant life, there are weeds. The weeds gum up the works to say the least. They cannot be removed easily. The parable today is about living in the gap – in a world of both abundance and destructive forces, until the day of harvest when they may be separated in due time. This is also known as Last Judgment. And many of us rather love this doctrine.

(Visualize Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*: “*Just you wait Henry Higgins just you wait.....*”).

However, the parable is there to comfort those who live in the gap with the assurance that at the end, the weeds will not ruin the harvest. It is extremely difficult to live in a gap. It is difficult to see the glory, living with the good alongside the evil, between the wheat and the weeds.

We know that the meaning of a novel whose ending has been lost is up for grabs. It is the same, as the Bible well knows, with our individual and collective histories. We cannot grasp the meaning without knowing the end.

This means for us that we should interpret life according to our faith that God's kingdom will finally win and every tear will be wiped away. The parables Jesus told about the end of time were written to help those communities understand and overcome the gap between what is and what ought to be.

They are also words written for today. We still live in the gap. Many know the feeling of God's love and have experienced it in their lives. Many have seen it in grand acts of compassion and small daily acts of kindness. Christians rejoice when

justice triumphs and celebrate when sickness turns to health. These are signs of the Reign of God come near.

Yet, people everywhere also wake daily to news on the global pandemic, of social unrest, of violence in homes and communities, of soul-crushing poverty in every country, of injustice, and all the many ways the dignity inherent in every person is neglected.

Christians are reminded now – we do not hope based on what we see. Christian hope is based on the confidence and assurance that the risen Christ is present in the world, bringing all things to what they are meant to be, closing the gap.

God's focus is on closing the gap between what is and what ought to be. This is the work of God from the beginning of creation. To be Christian is to join in this work, for all people are children of God, part of that creation coming into being.

The way to join in this work is know that what we do really matters, in this world and the world to come. While our ambiguous cultural lives and sense of denial erode our fragile sense of moral responsibility, we are called to be agents of love and mercy in the world.

This isn't a life that tries to ignore the gap. It is a life that can stride confidently into the gap – angered at injustice, grieving at suffering, striving and straining and groaning. Groaning is the soundtrack of creation. It is the sound of the gap closing, of the Spirit overcoming resistance. Life in the Spirit of God strains and groans and heaves and lifts to close the gap. It is a good, honest groaning, the soundtrack of what will be coming into being.

May we stay true in the struggle; groaning if need be, laughing at our groaning when we can. The gap is closing; let us hear the soundtrack of creation as we raise our voices in work and strain and hope and joy.