

Growing together

Divine reaper, who alone can judge without vengeance or fear: free us from our desire to repay evil with evil; root us in creation's longing for freedom from oppression; shape us by hope unseen for the victory of love; through Jesus Christ, with whom we suffer and are glorified.

A Collect for Proper 11A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 44:6-8; Psalm 86:11-17; Matthew 13:24-30

JULY 23, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 13:24-30

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 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?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 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.'"

I have come to see an enormous freedom in this parable that Jesus tells.

We are, of course, this field.

This field is my life. This field is your life.

Together we and all humanity are this field.

In your mind's eye, perhaps, see one of those magnificent drone-

photography images, where we are able, initially, to see our own selves clearly and in focus, and then, in very short order, there is the field of the person next to us, then all of the people near us, then, beyond our ability to process quickly, more and more and more of this global field – and we, of course, have become indistinguishable....

A field, this vast human field,

planted with wheat and weeds.

Where is the freedom in this?

The burden, the challenge, the pain is evident in what we hear from those field workers.

Where did these weeds come from? What are we going to do about them?

And, oh my God, so many weeds....

Mine, yours, all of ours...

Some days it can seem like it's all weeds. All the burden of contending with their thorny, destructive presence in our lives – pushing the wheat out of sight, constantly threatening, grabbing up the nutrients in the soil, using up the water, the air the wheat needs to flourish... And for what?

And this nagging, persistent, insistent sense we need to do something about them.

I need to get rid of these weeds... mine, yours (yours are so much clearer to me than my own sometimes), the others.... All of the others – look at all those weeds over there.

And so this parable has so often been seen as about the person who is wheat in opposition to the person who is weed. We know how our anxiety can do that. Wheat people vs weed people – yet another dichotomy we are reflexive about creating. Once we start, it seems we can't stop – even when

yanking up the weeds tears up the soil we ourselves are rooted in.... (Wheaty Republicans vs weedy Democrats, Wheaty North County vs weedy South County, Wheaty white folk vs weedy brown folk, wheaty Americans vs weedy Afghans... we can do this for days....)

We can get nearer to home, of course, and then we can get in our own heads where the real fun begins – and we find, in that mayhem, we soon focus so much on others – what they did, what they think, their feelings vs my feelings... – thank goodness for cable news and social media that we can get some relief (which is only distraction, of course) from our own lives, from attention to how we're growing, how we're caring for the wheat in us and around us....

Like the fieldworkers, guts clenched, perhaps fists clenched, certainly hearts clenched: we want to know what happened and what we're going to do about it!

Hand me the RoundUp! I'm going to take control and start spraying weeds....

In this parable, Jesus does not offer freedom from the confounding nature of weeds but freedom from needing to find them, root them out, and kill them.

And yes, we are face-to-face with the burden of actually seeing

and experiencing the weediness of human life.

Terrorism, whether we are threatening ourselves or being threatened by someone with a bomb, is *real*.

And, while I don't see Jesus telling us to go get blown up, he is revealing something larger about our lives, about our individual lives and about the life of humanity.

And the freedom is here....

First, discernment of weeds is often not our skill set and second, we have to recognize that the wheat and the weeds have grown together, their roots are actually entangled – not just theoretically in the same soil. This is what it is like to be human – and this reality needs to be faced. Let's be done with fantasies.

Third, the wheat is going to last and the weeds are not. So release the old idea that the good people will be gathered into the barn and the bad people will be thrown into hell. But imagine instead, God gathering up and treasuring all that is best about you (and all of us) and the final release of all that troubles you, that has, if you will, *bedeviled* you through your life – that those struggles will go up in smoke, eventually invisible and gone.... (Think of those you have known, who have gone before us, completely free of all we know that they struggled with, all the

weeds that crowded them, with which they contended.... Now completely free forever.)

And the same with all of the evil in the world – it, too, will vaporize....

How do we live in the world now? How do we exist in this context in which we are surrounded, in which we often feel suffocated by weeds, the weediness of life – whether it is our physical frailty, the illnesses and injuries, our vulnerability in relation to money and the resources we need to sustain ourselves and our families, our contention with difference, competition, feeling literally crowded off the field? There is so much of it.... And getting out the propane torch, the herbicide, the hoe, or tractor and blade – arming ourselves, just seems sensible....

We will, no doubt, do battle, at times....

Beyond whatever we try, whatever effort we make, at heart, we will need a type of faith (faith, in writing) that is not an intellectual assent to certain ideas, but is, instead, a vibrant and imperishable, vital vision, courage and daily endurance in the world of wheat and weeds (faith, in living) – and confidence in and focus on the largeness of the compassion of God that is available to us in our lives, in all human lives, in the whole of the

creation.

We will, at some point, the sooner the better, need to breathe and trust and refocus our lives on the *wheat* in the field, not panicking, seeing the wheat in the fields of those around us – even being surprised by it, at times, even being surprised that our neighbors have the same experience we do with our own weediness and weeds in general.

Our freedom is not letting the weeds and our opposition to them uproot *us*, our families, our neighborhoods, our world.

When we let wheat and weeds “grow together” as we hear in the parable, we can see the wheat growing to eternal value, the weeds “growing” to oblivion.

As we prayed at the beginning of our service today: in God’s compassion and grace, moment by moment, we can live without vengeance or fear. We can be free from a desire to repay evil with evil. We can be rooted in creation’s longing for freedom from oppression, and shaped by hope unseen for the victory of love.



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