

19 July 2020

Introduction

It is an age-old question: why is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds Jesus suggests that both grow together until the harvest. With Paul, we long for the day that all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. Having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly place our hope in the promises of God, and from the Lord's table we go forth to bear the fruit of justice and mercy.

Prayer of the Day

Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Romans 8:12-25

For Paul, true spirituality means that we experience the reality of the Spirit, which enables us to pray as God's children, keeps us in solidarity with creation, and gives us unseen hope that God will liberate us and creation from bondage to death and decay.

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus tells a parable about the coexistence of good and evil in this world. God's judgment will remove all evildoers and causes of sin, but not until the end of human history.

²⁴[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.’”

³⁶Then 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.” ³⁷He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

Sermon

Pentecost 7 A – Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Judge Not

Jesus teaches his disciples that they are not to judge between sin and righteousness

While I was in my garden this week I chatted briefly with my neighbour through the fence.

With words, because the fence is too high,
we compared the growth of various fruits and vegetables.

His sweet peppers are further along than mine.
My beans are producing better than his.

And then he asked about weeds.

And both of us agreed that it was the worst year either of us had ever experienced.

In places he was ready to give up;
the bad seeds had won.

I had been able to clear the spaces between rows,
but among the carrots, beets and parsnips,
I stopped pulling,
because removing the weeds was also uprooting the vegetables.

Just like last week
the reading from Matthew is a parable from Jesus,
and then the allegorical interpretation of the parable.

The former perhaps rooted in Jesus’ earthly ministry;
the latter the way that it was understood in Matthew’s congregation two or three generations later.

Like last week it is a story about farming.

Unlike last week the two parts work fairly well together.

This parable about the kingdom of heaven –
the way that God would like things to turn out –
has to do with a sower, his enemy, a field, and two types of seed.

God, the master,
has sent Jesus his son,
to sow the good seeds of mercy and grace.

But that night an enemy scattered bad seed in the same place.

And as the plants began to grow weeds were found to be sprouting up alongside wheat.

At which point the master's slaves,
standing in for the disciples of Jesus,
eagerly offered to go out and pull the weeds.

But Jesus, the sower,
tells them to leave the wheat and the weeds alone.
for in tearing out the one
they are likely to damage the other.

Instead, let them grow up together,
and let the reapers – representing the angels –
take care of sorting one from the other at harvest time.

Which is, to say,
our job is to watch Jesus sow
(perhaps as wildly as he did in last week's parable),
and perhaps then to join in the sowing ourselves,
but to let the angels preside over the weeding and the final judgement.

It is like the message some of you may have seen years ago
on billboards
or bumper stickers,
often from the King James translation:

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

A good summary of the parable.

But often followed,
a few miles down the road,
with messages from the same supplier of such billboards,
with the call for drivers to be on the look out for sin.
and to be ready to condemn it.

Which goes to the heart of Jesus' instruction to his disciples.

He knew the impulse to want to identify and destroy sin.
And sinners.

Although they were just children
in the process of seeing God through Jesus' eyes,
they were certain that they could tell the difference between good and evil.

And that separating bad people from good was the thing God was most concerned about.

Gentiles from Jews.

Women from men.

Lepers from clean.
Masters from servants.

Gay from straight.

Black from white.

Rich from... middle class.

They were sure that God was all about judgement;
excluding sinners from saints.

And that stepping in,
to do some of this judging on God's behalf,
would win them a seat in Paradise.

It is the same impulse that led Adam and Eve to bite the apple.

Eden was nice enough,
but it required them to trust God
for daily blessings.

Or for the Israelites,
as they gathered manna,
finding that when they took more than God instructed
it spoiled.

Since the dawn of time
we have wanted to push God to the sidelines,
and sit in God's seat of power and judgement.

We want to be arbiters of good and evil.
We bristle at the invitation to trust another.

We resent it when God does not smite wrongdoers;
when God does not pull out the bad weeds.

We want to take matters into our own hands.

And when Jesus tells us to stop judging

we resist him too.

Which is why,
if he came to us again,
as a human being,
he'd likely end up in jail
or worse.

Until we let his love for us soak in,
and soften us,
and save us from our love of judging.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

P Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

A God of all space and time, your whole creation groans in labour pains, awaiting the gift of new birth. Renew the earth, sky, and sea, so that all your creation experiences freedom from the bondage of decay. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

A God of the harvest, you sow the good seed of the gospel of Jesus Christ into your field. Help your church, including St. Ansgar's, throughout the world to be both diligent and patient, full of resolve and gentleness, that our witness may be faithful to your intentions. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

A God of the nations, teach us your ways, that we may walk in your truth. Mend the fabric of the human family, now torn apart by racism and violence. Guide us by your mercy, grace, and steadfast love. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

A God of hope, you accompany those who suffer and are near to the broken-hearted. Open our hearts to our brothers and sisters who are lonely, injured or ill, including (names...). Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

A God of healing, hold the whole world in your loving embrace as we wrestle with the COVID-19 virus. Strengthen care-givers and researchers, refresh those with mild symptoms, revive those who are in hospital, accompany those who have developed chronic symptoms, and console the families and friends of those who have died. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

A God of the seasons, in the midst of summer, give us refreshment, renewal, and new opportunities. We pray for the safety of those who travel. We pray for those who cannot take the rest they need. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

A God of life, those who have died in you shine like the sun in your endless kingdom. We remember with thanksgiving the saints of all times and places and saints close to us. Gather us with them on the day of salvation. Lord, in your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C **Amen.**

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, ✝ Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.