

Tenth Sunday of Pentecost, Proper 11 July 20 2008 Year "A"
Genesis 28:10-19; Psalm 139:1-11,22-23, Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-30.36-43
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A gardener once had a sign in his yard that read, "He who sows the seeds and waits, believes in God." In other words, it is good to have patience and know that in the darkness of the soil life is germinating and soon will produce life.

Those of us who have planted herbs, tomatoes, squash, onions, etc some time back are now ready to reap the harvest of what we planted. When we plant vegetables in our garden, we know that it will be a while before we see tomatoes or squash on the plants--we don't blame the plants for this. We have learned to be patient and no matter how much we claim to be impatient or to have no patience, when it comes to our plants, have great patience.

However, when it comes to people, we are certainly nowhere near as patient as we should be. Far too often we are quick to comment and judge that so-and-so is either a "bad seed" or a "good person," when the truth is we know nothing about the person and we certainly have no idea how they will eventually turn out. We don't even know which person is struggling to respond in a healthy manner to God's call. We certainly do not know which people are just adept at playing along to impress others. While we may be of help to our neighbor in digging up his or her garden, the one garden in which we should not be digging is God's garden because **not only** do we not know the difference between Wheat and weeds, **it is not our place** to be making such a judgment.

There are those who understand the story of the weeds and wheat to be a parable about the importance of being able to distinguish between wheat and weeds. IN other words, it's good to know who to avoid. There are

those, including ministers, who feel certain that they can tell the difference between wheat and weeds. And yet, if we look at it carefully, the story is about not judging. The wheat and the weeds, or if you prefer, the good and the bad people, should all be allowed to grow together, and let the judgment come at another time but not by us since none of us is God.

When we try to make rules that describe who is and who is not a child of God, the result is that we alienate good people; we uproot the wheat along with the weeds. Someone once said, “If your dogma causes you to judge people, then your dogma is wrong.”

It is possible that this parable was not told by Jesus or, if it was, the context has been changed to suit the situation in which Matthew found himself when he was writing it some sixty years later. The parable of the wheat, in the context of the time of Matthew as opposed to the time of Jesus, was an attempt to explain the cause of hypocrisy within the Christian church. There were those who joined the church for social reasons. These individuals may not have been believers but they were good at putting on a religious front. Matthew was making the point that it is not our place to judge who is a good Christian and who is not.

Take, for example, the case of Mike. Mike grew up in a Christian home, went to church regularly, served as an acolyte, got his Eagle Scout award from his Rector at the Sunday service. Mike became one of the youngest readers in his church and then an usher. From all externals Mike was the ideal Christian, the perfect Episcopalian, and one that probably should be called to the diaconate due to his work with the poor and needy.

It was not till the police showed up at church and arrested him after the Sunday morning service that people came to understand that Mike had a whole other life going on about which they knew nothing.

Another example is that of Nancy who was what is referred to as a "lady of the evening." At one point she had her own escort service. Her attendance at Church was somewhat irregular and periodically she also went to confession. When she was nineteen, Nancy began work as a teller in a bank in the city of Dublin. She was there a couple of years when she was offered twice her monthly salary to dance at a private club twice a week during her lunch hour and then it became a semi-permanent job as she needed to keep her bank job in the event her parents came in from the country. Nancy's extra income went to help a number of young people, families in need, the food pantry at a church. Nancy was well aware that she was no angel and certainly behaving in a manner that was against everything she was brought up to believe in. Initially she felt trapped and then she bought into the way of life and started her own business while she was being promoted at the bank. Nancy's death came in the form of a questionable accident and there were two very different types of people who attended her funeral who did not know one another.

Charles Colson began a halfway home in Washington D.C. for convicts. For the grand opening he invited members of the Senate, Congress and many other high profile friends and acquaintances. Part way through the afternoon of speeches and wonderful food a congressman took Colson aside and asked if he had anyone in the house as yet. "Sure", he replied, he had seven men in it. "Are they here?" was the next question. Colson laughed.

“Apparently’, said Colson, ‘you can’t tell the convicts from the senators. Isn’t that amazing.”

In the first reading this morning we have the story of Jacob leaving Beer-Sheba to go to Haran. While he slept he had this dream in which the Lord stood beside him and told him that he was going to give Jacob the land on which he was lying and that he was to be the father of a great nation. God promised Jacob this, *Know that I am with you and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.* Jacob got up and renamed the place *Bethel* meaning it was a holy place. As we listened to this story how many of us remember that this is the same Jacob that cheated his brother Esau of his birthright not once but twice and then cheated his blind father. After all that, he is chosen by God to be the father of a nation and named the nation, Israel, after him.

The psalmist has it right when he writes *Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.* We have no business digging in God’s garden. Again the psalmist has it right when he says: *Lord you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.. you are acquainted with all my ways..where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*

We have no business digging in God’s garden for we do not know the struggles that are going on inside the one we judge to be a sinner nor do we know what motivates the one whom we judge to be a saint. Either way it is none of our business and not our place to judge.

At a time in our life when we are so quick to judge and incarcerate people to get them out of our midst this is a good Gospel story. All of us are familiar with the "black sheep" of the family; of that person whose behavior is so radically different from the rest that it makes even the parents wonder, "where did we go wrong?"

Our natural tendency toward the seemingly abnormal is to remove it, to disown it, to get it out of our line of vision. And yet here is Jesus saying, let it be, let it grow so that you do not destroy that which is good which is growing around it.

This goes against everything we believe. There is something "wrong" in keeping that which is destructive among that which is healthy. There are those who can be rehabilitated if they can learn to live with the truth about themselves. Alcoholics Anonymous has an interesting way of looking at this: It states "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault. They seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those too who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest."

The capacity to be honest with oneself is the gift of life. It does not make us saints, but it does give us an ability to face our shortcomings, our faults, to work toward wholeness and not to be judgmental of others.

Jesus makes it clear by leaving the weeds with the wheat that he is not going to judge or punish. It's as if he hopes that by leaving the weeds with the wheat that the weeds might change. It is we who choose to separate ourselves and hide in the darkness by avoiding the truth. As Jesus said, *The truth will set you free*. It is only when we free ourselves by coming to grips with our shadow side, our weakness, our limitations, that we are free to make choices and reap the reward or accept the consequences.

Paul puts it slightly differently in his letter to the Romans, *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*.

To live by the Spirit is to be filled with life, to give life, to be co-creator with God in the world around us. To live according to the flesh is to live in darkness of who we are and our potential.

Let us shine in the sun and listen to God in our heart.