

Field of Weeds

July 20, 2008

(Pentecost 10 - Year A)

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

When I was about 5 years old, I had this toy parking garage that I got from my Grandma Fisher and Papaw for Christmas.

The toy parking garage was made of metal.

And I would take my Hot Wheels cars and make them park and go up ramps and down a car elevator in this great toy parking garage.

However, one day, my little brother, David, who was about 2 years old at the time, toddled by in these hard-soled shoes, and he stepped right on top of my toy parking garage, crushing it smack in the middle and smashing it to pieces.

I was furious at my brother for ruining my favorite toy.

I wanted to retaliate.

I wanted revenge.

I wanted to punch his lights out,

Because he had sown weeds into my field.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says:

“The kingdom of heaven can 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.”

Now, when the plants came up, both the wheat and the weeds grew.

The workers in the field then go to their master farmer and ask:

“Where did these weeds come from?”

And the master farmer answers:

“An enemy has done this.”

Then, the workers in the field want revenge on the enemy who has planted the weeds.

So, the workers in the field ask their master:

“Then do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?”

Yet, even though the master’s field is now filled with weeds, the master does not want retaliation or violence or revenge.

Instead, the master emphatically answers:

“No.

Don’t go out and yank up the evil weeds.

For if you go out and gather up the evil weeds you will also yank out the good wheat with them.

Instead, let both the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest.”

The morning of September 11th, 2001, dawned clear and cool.

And our land of amber waves of grain was a filled with good wheat.

However, on that morning, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.

An enemy came and planted weeds into our field, by flying airplanes into buildings.

If we ever doubted the existence of evil in this world, that doubt was dashed amidst dust and ashes and collapsing buildings.

Soon after that cool September 11th morning, President Bush stood in the wheat field with a bullhorn in his hand, on top of the twisted rubble and beams that was once the World Trade Center.

With patriotic fervor, the brave men who had begun the recovery effort asked:

“Where did these weeds come from?”

And President Bush correctly answered:

“An enemy has done this.”

And the men who had gathered at Ground Zero, as well as many of us, then asked:

“Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?”

Do you want us to go after the people responsible for these attacks?

Do you want us to go looking into spider holes to yank up these weeds that have been sown among our amber waves of grain?"

We all know how we have answered those questions. In our grief, in our anger, in our response to 9-11, we went out and yanked up the weeds from the field, using shock and awe and color-coded levels of homeland security.

However, our response of retaliation and of violence and of revenge is *not* the way that Jesus completes his parable of the weeds.

In Jesus' parable of the weeds, the workers in the field ask their master: "Do you want us to go and yank up those weeds?"

And the master emphatically answers:

"No.

For if you go out and gather up the evil weeds, you will also yank out the good wheat with them.

Instead, let both the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest."

In my reading of the good news of Jesus Christ, Jesus never condones violence in response to violence.

Jesus *never* approves of retaliation or revenge.

Jesus *never* asks us to go after the evil weeds.

Instead, Jesus says:

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."¹

Jesus says that if someone slaps your face, then let them slap the other side as well.²

Jesus says that,

If someone smashes your toy parking garage,

If someone flies airplanes into your buildings,

If someone sows weeds into your field,

¹ Matthew 5:44

² See Luke 6:29

Then let both the wheat and the weeds grow together peacefully, side by side, until the harvest.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a field, a field where both the good wheat and the bad weeds are allowed to grow together.

In Jesus' parable, when the master of the field tells the workers that they should not go out into the field and yank up the weeds,

The master tells them:

“Let both of them grow together, the wheat and the weeds.”

If we look carefully at this story of the weeds, the Greek verb that is translated into English as “to let them” is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as:

To forgive, to allow, to permit, to let them grow together.

Essentially what Jesus is saying is that we should *forgive* the weeds, we should *allow* the evil to grow side by side with the good, we should *permit* them to be together.

Jesus uses this same word himself, when he hangs on the Cross, praying: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”³

Or, we could say that Jesus prays from the Cross:

“Father, let them, forgive them, allow them, to sow weeds of evil in your field.”

We like to think that evil is somewhere out there, in terrorists or in “bad people.”

However, if we are honest with ourselves, there is a little bit of weeds, there is a little bit of evil, inside each one of us.

I cannot look out into this congregation today and pick out which ones of you are wheat and which of you are weeds.

I cannot label us because none of us are 100% good or 100% evil.

And, thank God, that Jesus forgives us for the evil inside of us.

³ Luke 23:34

Thank God that God forgives, that God allows, that God permits, the good and the bad to grow up, side by side, inside each of us.

And sometimes we forget that we are not the harvester and we are not the master of the field.

When my little brother, David, smashed my toy parking garage and I wanted retaliation and revenge,
My mother reminded me that she was the parent, and I was not.
And *we* need constant reminding that God is the master of the field, God is the judge at the final harvest, and we are not.

So, instead of acting like *we* are the judge,
Instead of going after terrorists or ex-husbands or co-workers whom we think are evil,
Instead of looking for revenge and for retaliation,
Instead of yanking weeds out of the ground,
Forgive and let the weeds and the wheat grow up together in the field.

For as we pray in the Lord's Prayer:
Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those...who are weeds.

AMEN.

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