

## **July 23, 2023-Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**

Introduction to the day and its themes: The parables Jesus tells reveal something of God's heart. It might be helpful to look for what God is up to before we try to put ourselves into the parable's story line. Notice how today God plays the long game....the very long game when it comes to setting all things right again.

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

24He put before them 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.

43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.  
Let anyone with ears listen!

## SERMON

Let the weeds grow and sort it all out at harvest time? Terrible gardening.  
Potentially good theology.

Potentially good when we let go of our felt need to control everything and to resist the urge to nip some of that evil in the bud, to quote Barney Fife. I think we get that part of the parable—don't get slap happy with the weeding you'll just uproot the good God is doing.

Here's the tricky part...First in light of the stories Jesus tells about wheat and weeds, good fish and bad fish and so on, it turns out that it's all such a mixed lot we'd have better luck splitting the atom with our home chemistry sets than we would winnowing out good and evil. Way above our pay grade.

Second, we're left floundering about how to deal with the creeping bell flower that's choking out everything in its path. Archbishop Desmond Tutu warns against quietism by saying, *"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."*

The faithful response would be first to care for those being trampled on. I would argue that religious-sounding folk advocating taking away other people's civil and human rights on the basis of gender—particularly those who are transgender—strikes smack in the bulls-eye when it comes to doing fatal harm while self-righteously claiming to be weeding the garden.

A few years ago I would have prescribed education and dialogue with those I consider scorched earth garden weeders. Sorry, I've lost all confidence in that route. So we're back to something Jesus modelled—blessing and caring for the poor in spirit. Drawing from the prophet Isaiah, we might describe our faithful response as not tromping all over the bruised reed or snuffing the dimming wick. In modern parlance, besides not kicking people when they're down, we might see about helping them get up too.

Arch Bishop Tutu also believes we're obligated not only to fish out those who've fallen into the river, but to wander upstream and find out why folk are plunging in in the first place.

Here's where the theologizing comes in....Jesus has a tender spot in his heart for the poor in spirit. Remember Jesus' stern warnings about causing the so called little ones to trip up because of our actions? Jesus so identifies with the downtrodden that he'd tell a story about sheep and goats and cap off the parable by saying however you treat the harried and harassed is how you'd treat Jesus himself.

Whether we're tempted to dismantle the tangled nettles of injustice or we're inclined to stay out of the garden altogether; we as church and we as individuals can remember we have ears to hear...REALLY hear. We can let the rule of the heavens soak into us and let Jesus teach us about loving our neighbour.