

Sermon July 19/20 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 & Psalm 86:11-17

Psalm 86:11-17

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and glorify your name forevermore.

For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the pit of death.

The arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent people seeks my life; they have not set you before their eyes.

But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

Turn to me and have mercy on me; give your strength to your servant, and save the child of your handmaid.

Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame; because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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!”

Summer is the season of parables, the brain teasers Jesus liked to use excite the imagination of his listeners. Some of us like puzzles – maybe crossword puzzles, Sudoku - they make us think – and they’re fun!

The 13th chapter of Matthew is full of parables, but this teaching device didn’t always work. Concerned about that, “... the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” [Matt 13.10-11] As current day disciples, we have also been given that gift.

Teaching about the kingdom of heaven was core to Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew’s gospel we hear that phrase “the kingdom of heaven” 43 times!

So let's have a look. For example, this phrase is familiar: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" It came near in the person of Jesus – and it comes near to us as we read and contemplate God's Word.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said two groups were already IN the kingdom of heaven – it had become a reality for them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit [meaning those devoid of spiritual arrogance], for **theirs is the** kingdom of heaven. And "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for **theirs is the** kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3,10)

So maybe the kingdom of heaven, at least in present time, is essentially an attitude. The future kingdom of heaven becomes real now – when Jesus' teachings are deeply embedded in our hearts, and our thoughts and actions grow out of those teachings.

Our thoughts are incredibly important. Now thoughts and imaginings flit through our minds, but what we choose to dwell on, grows and becomes more solid over time. Our personalities are formed and shaped by our habits of thought.

The bible is full of psychological truth that helps us become our best selves. Listen to Paul's sage advice in Philippians 4:8:

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.***

The people of God have always known the importance of meditating on God's word. Our psalm today emphasizes that:

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
[Psalm 86:11]

Ok – so that's all good and well, but what does it have to do with today's parable about the wheat and the weeds?

Remembering that the mind is the builder of our personality, and that our minds can be influenced by many things, and not all things are good to focus on – for some thoughts can be absolutely toxic – let's look again at our parable.

The sower sows seed – and the parable takes us from sowing and sprouting on to the end of life, the time of harvest.

From early on, there is a disturbing problem: weeds appear next to the wheat planted by the sower. If this parable is about you and me, we are created in God's image, but from our early years we struggle with our thoughts and behavior. "*Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.*" From when we are little to when we are old, we need help to follow God's way, the way of truth and love. As Paul says, it's important to focus on what is true and honourable, just and pure. There is much in the world that doesn't fit those categories!

So wheat and weeds – both growing in our hearts and minds from an early age. But it's worse than that! The Greek word translated as "weeds" is actually tares (King James version) or darnel.

Darnel, or *lolium temulentum*, is a grain resembling wheat that is toxic to humans: "acting injuriously upon the brain and stomach". The darnel grows up at first with stalk and blade like the wheat; and it's not till the kernels begin to form that the difference is easily detected [<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/13-25.htm>]

No wonder the servants in the story are upset – they see the potential problem. This parable is not about weeds that crowd out the wheat, like seed choked out by thorns. This is a different danger. Here the toxic weeds mimic the wheat until the kernels start to form. Then they show their true nature. But by that point they've been growing together a long time – their roots are twisted together – pull up one and you pull up the other. Hence the warning to the servants.

But if the wheat and darnel were harvested together, and ground into flour – the flour would be ruined, and the person consuming bread from that flour would become sick!

This sounds like a cautionary tale. So what does it mean for you and me? Perhaps Martin Luther can help us. Remember his phrase: “Simul Justus et Peccator” – meaning simultaneously sinner and saint. We are justified or made righteous through Christ in our baptism, but sanctification, the work of being made holy, is a life-long process where we grow, by fits and starts, into our baptismal gift.

It's true: we are both wheat and weeds, simultaneously sinners and saints. It's only through Christ, with his arm around our shoulders, that we're made righteous. But God loves us too much to leave us as we are, a mess of weeds and wheat. Our patient loving God has a plan, and we're given the gift of time - and given helpers along the way.

Remember the importance of our thoughts, and what we dwell on? As we turn our faces toward God, like the sunflower following the sun, the wheat grows; the darnel diminishes. God helps us to do this. *“Teach me your way, O Lord, [says the psalmist] that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.”*

That is the grace of God – giving us time - so that Jesus' teachings might be deeply embedded in our hearts, and our thoughts and actions might grow out of those teachings.

I doubt that any of us will be totally weed free this side of heaven. But as we immerse ourselves in God's life-giving Word; as we live out Jesus' teachings, the Kingdom of Heaven becomes more and more a present reality in our lives. That is God's hope and plan for us. Thanks be to God!

Amen