

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 19, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30, 34-43

“Watch Out for the Weeds”

Last week we spoke about the parable of the “four soils” and sowing seeds in those soils. In today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus gives us a vision of not only the work of the enemy, but of the judgement to come and its effect on the fruit of the enemy. In this parable, the workers came to the owner and asked if they could pull the weeds, but they were told to let them grow alongside the wheat – and when time for the harvest came – they would be separated. He did not want to pull out the weeds until its proper time. We need to be aware of the weeds – and watch out for the weeds!

I am glad that God does not judge us on the spot and if necessary punish according to His absolute holiness. God does not run the universe as a ‘short order cook’ or in today’s day and age an ‘on demand’ program, but instead we need to wait on the Lord and let Him do His will.

The Lord Jesus, in today’s Holy Gospel talks about waiting; and you know what - waiting is difficult. For example – you go to the doctor and wait, and wait in the “waiting room,” getting frustrated by the minute. You had an eight o’clock appointment and now it is eight thirty! Maybe you get called into the office, and they do the triage and then they send you back out into the waiting room – or you stay in the room and you sit there for another 20 minutes. Our human nature does not like to wait. We are constantly saying, ‘my time is important too!’ Our human nature is what it is – we cannot help it. God’s kingdom is like this parable – with some wanting to pull out the weeds right away – to undo the work of the evil, midnight sower. Jesus’ followers did not want to wait and were not interested in God’s timetable because they had one of their own, and they expected God to conform to it – and act on it. The servants wanted to go right into the fields and ‘pull them up,’ to root out the weeds. The farmer stops them because life is never that simple. In their efforts to rid the field of weeds they are likely to pull up some valuable wheat too. Jesus might have been illustrating and making a statement about the Zealots, the revolutionary groups of His day, who were only too ready to go out into God’s field and pull up what looked like weeds. One of the apostles was a zealot – Simon the zealot – not Simon Peter.

These ‘servants’ may have intended to do God’s will, and they were longing for God to act, and were prepared to help Him by acting themselves. But part of Jesus’ whole mission is to say that the true kingdom of God does not come like that, because that is not the character of God Himself. At the heart of the parable of the weeds and the wheat is patience – not just the patience of the servants who have to wait and watch, but the patience of God Himself. I believe that God did not and does not enjoy the sight of a wheat field covered with weeds all over the place. He also does not relish the thought of declaring “harvest-time” too soon, and destroying wheat along with weeds. Many Jews of Jesus’ time recognized this, and spoke of God’s great compassion, delaying His judgment so that more people could be saved at the end. Jesus, as well as the Apostle Paul and other early Christian writers took the same view. Somehow Jesus wanted His followers to live with the tension of believing that the kingdom was arriving in and

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through Him, and that this kingdom would come, would fully arrive, not with a bang but through a process like the slow growth of a sheath of wheat; that is what we called in seminary - the tension of the 'already' and the 'not yet.'

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus was constantly active, He showed deep compassion, battling evil and defeating it – and still warning that the final overthrow of the enemy was yet to come. We who live after Jesus' death on Calvary and His glorious Resurrection know that God did act suddenly and dramatically at that moment - for the salvation of His creation. When we long for God to act, to fix the world's mess, we have to stop and remind ourselves that He has already acted, stepping into the middle of time – so that we might be saved. We wait with patience, not like people in a dark room wondering if anyone will ever come with a lit candle or flashlight, but like people in early morning who know that the sun is coming up and are now waiting for the full brightness of midday. Do not misunderstand me – do not think that I am saying that we do not need to pray about illnesses and things like that – no, we DO need to pray, asking for God's compassion and mercy. Well, the Parable of the wheat and the weeds tell us that God is right with you. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross paid the price. We need to be aware of the weeds – and watch out for the weeds! It is easy to tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds – but God said 'be patient' – we can see those who do not glorify God and have their own agenda. It is quite easy to see that.

Each one of us is made in the image and likeness of God. Listen to these words from Genesis 1:26-28 *"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

As we were coming to church this morning, Marilyn told me something that she read that intrigued her, and I think sort of angered her because we just did a study on Genesis, during our Wednesday Night Bible Study. This person was writing this: mankind was created on the sixth day, and I think no one will argue with that, because that is what Scripture said. This person wrote that Adam was created after that. I am sorry, but Adam was the first of mankind, "Adam" means first man. It is amazing how we can let culture dictate our beliefs and pardon the expression 'screw them up!' Read the Bible! This person was reading it literally because the first chapter talks about creation, and the second chapter talks about Adam and the creation of Eve and so on. That timeline does not work. Take the six days as God doing what He did, creating mankind on the sixth day, see verses 26-28, to rule over creation.

God intends that each of us should reflect a different facet of His glory. God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit created humanity in His own image. How often have we heard Jesus say, *"you are the light of the world"* or *"let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16) We are made in His image, but we are to

reflect that image – and most importantly – we are not to claim to be that image! We are a reflection of His image. As I said last week, it is not about us – but it is about Him.

When the end comes and God’s great “human harvest” is complete, we will not be like hundreds of identical bundles of wheat; but we will be as different as the flowers and shrubs in a beautiful garden, each one of us unique, only more incredibly so. Each one of us is as unique as a fingerprint or a snowflake. We will be as different as we are today. I want to suggest to you that what Jesus is talking about is a redeemed, renewed humanity that will be, at last, what God meant it to be before the disobedience: the reflection of which the rest of creation can see who its Creator truly is, and can worship and serve Him in Spirit and Truth.

It is all too easy to read about evildoers being thrown into a burning fiery furnace and to think of medieval images like Dante’s *Inferno* of hellfire and damnation. Many of us have sat through hours of sermons filled with fire and brimstone. Growing up I heard a lot of those, and they did not bring me closer to the Lord – but instead gave different meaning to the fear of the Lord. There are some who have sought to deny any teaching of future judgment at all – sin – what sin? There is no cost for sin. Some ‘progressive thinkers’ want to say either that God would never judge or condemn anyone or that He will postpone the harvest until every single weed has somehow been turned magically into wheat.

Our God is a loving God – a true gentleman who would never force Himself or His will on anyone. Please understand this – that is what Revelation 3:20 is all about – the image of Jesus standing at a door that has no handle or doorknob – He is knocking and waiting for that person to open the door of their heart. Yes, He could just walk through; He walked through the door on the Day of Resurrection to meet with the apostles in the Upper Room (John 20). He is God, after all! He will never force Himself on anyone or in any situation, but instead He gives His creation a generous choice – to choose to live like that true reflection of Him – or NOT. Choose eternal Life – or NOT. It is that simple. You have heard me tell you time and time again that God loves all of humanity so much that He sent His Son, Jesus of Nazareth to give Himself freely for everyone. The choice is simple – believe in Him – or NOT. Jesus’ words in John 3:16-18 are noticeably clear – if you believe in Him – you are saved; if you do not believe in Him – you are condemned already. That is what the wheat and the weeds in all about! The choice belongs to each one of us.

God is Judge and God the Father has delegated that judgment to ‘*the son of man*’, the One who had been sowing the good seed, the One who, as those listening to Jesus’ would realize, is Jesus Himself! This powerful parable draws from the book of Daniel. Listen to some examples:

- ‘*The son of man*’ is spoken of in Daniel 7:13, where ‘*one like a son of man*’ is given “*authority, glory and sovereign power*” with the right to judge and rule over all who have oppressed God’s people.

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- Jesus' mention of the *'fiery furnace'* echoes the Scripture about Daniel's friends, *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* in chapter 3 of Daniel. (You may have even sung about them in Sunday School.)
- Jesus' referring to the phrase *'The righteous will shine like the sun'* should remind us of what is written in Daniel 12:3, foretelling the resurrected glory of God's people.

The prophetic Book of Daniel was relied upon by the people of Israel, because they thought it predicted the soon-to-come victory of Israel over the Gentile nations – who were oppressing them through their horrible rule. Jesus was warning them that what they were hoping for would come - but that God's judgment might not be what they expected. The world would need to look at themselves in light of Jesus Himself and what He was doing – and the salvation that comes only through Him. That is why Jesus ended this parable with the command, *'He who has ears, let him hear.'* Jesus is telling us that we need to have Kingdom ears – to hear the Word of God and to respond to it as wheat and not weeds! My friends – look out for the weeds!