

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

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

"Seeds of Faith"

It is funny sometimes people say "You know in the 'old church' we used to have a lot of readings with commas and space. How come we still see this happening?" Well, I will explain it to you very simply: today, the two most important parts of this Gospel were that Jesus told the parable and then He told the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast – which are two entirely different sermons –so basically we went directly to the portion that Jesus explains the parable to the disciples. I want you to feel comfortable with that – because in the 'old world' the lectionary used to eliminate a lot of Scripture that was pointing to sin and conviction – we are no longer doing that and so I wanted to explain that to you about the comma and the space.

Do you think you would really like it if God were to rule the world directly and immediately, so that your every thought and action were weighed, and instantly judged and if necessary punished on the spot according to His absolute holiness? If the price of God stepping in and stopping something like genocide were that He would also have to rebuke and restrain every other evil impulse, including those which many people hold near and dear to their hearts, would we be prepared to pay that price? If we ask God to take action on special situations, do we really suppose that He would do that simply when we want Him to, and then He would back off again for the rest of the time? Let me make this clear - God does not run the universe as a 'short order cook' or in today's day and age an 'on demand' program.

What Jesus is talking about in today's Holy Gospel is waiting; and you know as well as I do that waiting is what we all find difficult. You go to a doctor's office and you sit there for more than 10 minutes and all of a sudden – you are aggravated. Or you get called in – they do the triage and then they send you back out into the waiting room – and you are there for another 20 minutes. We do not like to wait. The farmer waits for the harvest-time, getting increasingly frustrated as weeds grow alongside the wheat. That's what God's kingdom is like. The problem is that Jesus' followers didn't want to wait. Those people weren't interested in God's timetable because they had one of their own, and believe it or not they expected God to conform to it – and act on it. Did you catch what the servants said about the weeds? They want to go right into the fields and 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 very likely to pull up some valuable wheat too. It is possible that Jesus was making a statement here 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.

There were many groups, including some of the Pharisees, who were eager to fight against pagans on one hand and against compromised Jews on the other. These 'servants' may have intended to do God's will. They were longing for God to act, and were prepared to help Him by taking action themselves. But part of Jesus' whole mission is to say that the true kingdom of God doesn't come like that, because God Himself isn't like that. 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. God didn't and doesn't enjoy the sight of a wheat field with weeds all over the place. He 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, followed by 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 indeed arriving in and through His own person and work, and that this kingdom would come, would fully arrive, not with a bang but through a process like the slow growth of a sheaf of wheat; the tension of the already and the 'not yet.'

This can seem like a cop-out today, and probably did in Jesus' day as well. Saying that God is delaying His final judgment can look at first glance like saying that God is inactive or even uncaring. But when we look at the works of Jesus Christ in His own life it's impossible to say that God doesn't care. Jesus was very active, deeply compassionate, battling with 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 indeed act suddenly and dramatically at that moment - for His creation. When today we long for God to act, to fix the world's mess, we have to remind ourselves that He has already done so, and that what we are now waiting for is the full completion and results of those events. 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. Don't misunderstand me – don't think that I am saying that we don't need to pray about illnesses and things like that – no, we do need to pray – we need to ask for God's compassion and mercy. When the Twin Towers were knocked down on September 11th – people were asking 'where is God in all of this?' 'How come He didn't stop it?' Well, the Parable of the wheat and the weeds tell us that God is right there. God is caring, but He has to wait for it to all play out. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross paid a price.

C. S. Lewis of the Chronicles of Narnia and other great books, in a famous sermon, once declared that every human being, man, woman and child you meet is someone who, if you saw them now as they will be one day, would either make you recoil from them in horror or would strongly tempt you to worship them. It isn't the physical brightness that matters, though it may well be that in God's new world that His true children will themselves be sources of light, not merely recipients. What matters is the place they will have in God's Kingdom which won't have anything to do with privilege or pride. It will have to do with reflecting and expressing the love and glory of God Himself; that's what we are all meant to do. Each human being was created to be what could best be described as a 'God-reflector.' That's part of what 'being made in God's image' is all about. 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.” Since we are all different, 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 God 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 – not claim to be that image!

When the end comes and God’s great “human harvest” is complete, we won’t be like hundreds of identical bundles of wheat; but we will be as different as the flowers and shrubs in a beautiful garden, only incredibly more so. Each one of us is as unique as a fingerprint – we will be as different as we are in human life. We have to be careful saying that we will have ‘glory’ and ‘power’ because that can be easily misunderstood. I want to suggest to you that what Jesus is talking about is a redeemed, renewed human race 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’s 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 sermons filled with fire and brimstone, which were written to frighten people into believing they’d fry in hell if they didn’t do X, Y and Z. Some people have sought to deny any teaching of future judgment at all. 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. God is not some sadistic monster who would happily condemn most of His beloved, image-bearing creation to eternal fire. God is not an indulgent grandparent determined to spoil the youngsters rotten by letting them do whatever they like and still giving them sweets at the end of the day – before turning them over to mommy and daddy. Both images are completely and utterly wrong. 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. He could just walk through; He walked through the wall on the Day of Resurrection to meet with the apostles in the Upper Room. He is God, after all! He will never force Himself on anyone or in any situation. Absolutely not - but instead gives His creation a generous choice – to choose to live like that true reflection of Him – or NOT. 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 very 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 – ‘smoking or non-smoking!’ I know which way I want to spend eternity.

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 masterfully draws from the book of Daniel. Give you 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. Jesus' mention of the '*fiery furnace*' echoes the Scripture about Daniel's friends, *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego* in chapter 3 of Daniel. 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 is a book which the people of Israel heavily relied upon because they thought it predicted the soon-to-come victory of Israel over the 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's why Jesus ended this parable with the command, '*He who has ears, let him hear.*' My friends, we need to have Kingdom ears – to hear the Word of God and to respond to it as wheat and not weeds!