

The Parable of the Weeds and Wheat

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[0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on July the 6th 1997. The preacher is Hilary Roth. The sermon is entitled The Parable of the Weeds and Wheat and is taken from Matthew 13 verses 24 to 43.

The parable in today's Gospel reading follows on from the parable of the sower and the soils. And this is another parable which comes from the agriculture of Jesus' day. But this time it focuses on the final judgment.

Today it seems that the prophets who write and speak about the final judgment on creation actually come from the news analysts or the journal editors.

A man called Jonathan Skell wrote a book called The Fate of the Earth. And he said that human civilization was threatened with total devastation by a nuclear holocaust.

And the end of the Cold War has made us sort of indifferent to that possibility.

[1 : 3 2] But America and Russia are still custodians of a nuclear arsenal that actually grew while they worked on bringing about mutual nuclear disarmament.

The end of civilization by nuclear confrontation, Skell said, is a distinct possibility.

Meanwhile we live in an age where farmers handle the problem of weeds in among the wheat with herbicides. Herbicides that give us serious concern for our environment.

We told regularly that the presence of these poisons are endangering not only the weeds among the wheat, but the wheat as well.

As well as all the vegetation that gets into the very marrow of our bones. An environmentalist like Jonathan Weiner says in his book called The Next Hundred Years.

[2 : 5 4] That our planet has no life insurance policy. Infants born today, he says, may experience more changes in their lifetime than the planet Earth has since the birth of civilization.

Much has to be done if we are to preserve the creation as we know it.

Jesus did not approach the subject of the final judgment like the doomsday prophets of our day.

Though he did encourage us to good stewardship of the creation. Jesus did make it very clear on many occasions that we will all be held accountable.

Jesus said in this parable that we are looking at today. That the kingdom of heaven may be compared with someone who sowed good seed in his field.

[4 : 1 5] The kingdom itself is not like the man, but is like the situation in the man's field.

It's like the situation at the present time while the plants are still developing and later on at the time of harvest. Both the farm and the kingdom of God in this present time are a mixture.

A mixture of the good and the bad which are mingled together. And then we read in verse 25.

But while everybody was asleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away.

And we read his enemy in the RSV. What this enemy does is mean and cruel and cowardly and sadistic.

[5 : 29] He waits until everyone is fast asleep so that he will not be seen and caught. And then without the least bit of concern for all the labor that has been put into the field, the financial costs and the hopes for the future, he oversows the field with weeds.

As I've mentioned when we read in the RSV, the enemy is specifically mentioned as his enemy. The sower's enemy.

And this points to the fact of God's good work in history is opposed.

God has a special enemy. Where that enemy came from and why he's here at all are questions that are not answered in this gospel.

But the enemy in this story is not able to root out the good seed that the farmer has sown.

[6 : 45] No one shall pluck them out of my hand, we read in John chapter 10 verse 29. He is only able to sow bad seed right in the middle of the wheat and sow to confuse the workers.

In verse 27, the servants of the farmer ask him if it's true that he sowed only good seed in his field, which is a question which they already knew the answer to.

And so they quickly came on to the real question. So where did the weeds come from? Where did they come from? And this is the problem of evil.

And probably the most often asked question in the church. If God is a God of love, why is there so much evil in the world?

And more specifically, if God is building a church in the world, why are there so many evil people in it? The disciples wanted to know why and who is to blame.

[8 : 14] Where did all these weeds come from? An enemy did this.

We are told in verse 28. An enemy did this. And these four words are all we get for an answer.

An enemy did this. Which leaves much unsaid. We would like to know much more about this enemy.

Where did he come from? Why is he an enemy at all? But yet this answer does supply us with a most important piece of information.

God did not do the evil work. God is cleared of blame for the evil.

[9 : 21] The evil in the church and in church history is not due to the poor work of God in sowing his field.

It's due to God's enemy. Jesus in the early church believed in the devil.

And we saw this enemy at work in the first parable of the sower and the soils, sweeping away the seed sitting on the footpath. And we see him at work again in the second parable, spoiling the good sowing of the Lord.

We can't read the Gospels without seeing clearly that the disciples of Jesus believed and believed that Jesus believed in the existence of an evil one who sought to oppose the purposes of God.

Jesus' four words, an enemy did this, defends God's honour and points to the true source of evil.

[10 : 44] And so, with the theological foundation laid that God is good and his enemy is the source of evil, the next question asked in this story is the ethical question.

What is to be done? And so the servant said to him, then do you want us to go and gather them?

Verse 28. Do you want us to go and gather them? If evil is anti-God, is against God, then it should be the will of God to get rid of evil.

So the disciples' ethical question about getting rid of evil is almost as often asked as the theological question about the source of evil.

And in verse 29, Jesus answers the question. He answers it firmly with his famous no. For in gathering the weeds, you would uproot the wheat along with them.

[12 : 18] It seems weak of Jesus to forbid this logical and strategic step to co-exist with evil rather than to cancel it out seems compromising.

It seems ineffectual. But you would uproot the wheat, he says, along with them.

Some evil may in fact be removed by this violence. But in the process it's impossible to avoid uprooting the good as well.

And we know, do we not, that more often than not the innocent more than the guilty are hurt.

And in verse 30 we read, Let them both grow together until the harvest. And at the harvest time I will tell the reapers collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned.

[13 : 40] But gather the wheat into my barn. Jesus is unapologetically referring to the divine judgment at the end of history.

And one of the central doctrines of Jesus' teaching in Matthew is that there is such a judgment.

But this parable also shows us the gracious tolerance of God. The master said to his servants, let them both grow together until the harvest.

In his kingdom God does not want the work of the final judgment to be rushed. The time before the harvest is a time of his grace and a time of his love.

people have the opportunity to repent and to come into a relationship with him.

[15 : 01] We Christians tend to think that evil is winning out in this world. The scales appear to be tipped in the favor of evil.

God is patient with those who have lost their way.

And he's willing to wait for those who will repent. And we all know of instances of this in people's lives. We all know of people who have fallen out of the life of the church but have returned.

We know of people who have had dramatic changes in their lives when they finally come to faith in Christ. One minister who visits prisoners told of one inmate who was living out a sentence of 31 years.

And when asked what was his attitude towards being imprisoned, the inmate said that he was grateful. He was grateful because he had come to know Christ while he was in prison.

[16 : 23] Had he not been imprisoned for his wrongdoing, he may not have come to know about God's love for him. The time until the harvest is a time God allows for people to come to the knowledge of his love and his grace for all.

For God does not withhold his grace from those whom he is still seeking to win. him. And if those servants in the parable are questioning of this tolerant attitude of the master, the master assures them that all will turn out right in the end.

The master says, at harvest time, I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first, and bind them in bundles to be burned.

So, we are not to mistake the postponement of the weeding out of the bed as indifference on God's part.

Because in due time, God will appoint a moment, a moment for that final judgment to fall upon the world.

[17 : 59] And in actual fact, there is no delay in judgment. Because what appears to us as a postponement is a sign of our own impatience with God.

God does know what's going on in this world of people. God's direction for the final harvest shows us his constant presence in a world gone mad.

No one knows how evil and perverse this generation is more than God. God knows too that not all will respond to his genuine offer of love.

God's love. So in the end, the weeds will be thrown into the fire to be burned. And those who have failed to respond to the best efforts of God will be excluded from his kingdom.

them. And in this parable, the master also orders the wheat to be gathered into his barn.

[19 : 25] The parable shows the loving character of God. God who desires that all should be saved and brought to the knowledge of his love and his truth.

God is consistently making every effort to see that all are safely brought into the harvest.

But the parable also shows us that God is extremely patient with us because each one of us can remember in our life a time in our life that was empty of faith.

Maybe our teen years or our college years, times when we have found extra difficulties, times when we have been depressed, when we experience disappointment or disillusionment.

There have been many times in our life when we have been found empty of faith. And we need to thank God for his extreme patience with us.

[20 : 50] His patience with us then are not moving in on us to weed us out as evil ones. And so therefore we too are challenged.

We're challenged by God's example to show the same kind of patience with our neighbours and our families and our friends. Bigotry and intolerance will never be acceptable.

This parable tells us we must practice a hands-off policy in judging who will finally be lost.

As we ourselves have experienced the patience of God, we should deal patiently with others in love.

Amen. in.