

Wheat & THE Weeds EVIL

July 19th, 2020 Covid...
Matthew 13:24-33 & 36-39

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Matthew 13:24-33 & 36-39 NRSV

²⁴ Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And 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?' ²⁸ He answered, 'An enemy has done this. 'The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let 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.'"

³¹ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

³⁶ Then 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." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

In this reading we hear God's voice. Thanks be to God.

Sermon

A year ago this past week, Canada had the biggest manhunt in our history after two young men from BC killed three people randomly on a northern BC highway and then evaded the RCMP for 10 days before taking their own lives in Manitoba. In the middle of Covid and all the difficulties and tragedies that have happened in 2020, that tragedy feels like a million years ago. One of the people murdered was Leonard Dyck, a university lecturer who loved nature, and the other two were a young couple in love: Chynna Deese, from North Carolina and Lucas Fowler, from Australia.



As you might understand, the relatives of the those who were killed are still deep in grief over the loss one year later.

“Pastor Kim, it’s summer and life has been so very hard. Why bring up a topic like this? Don’t we have enough bad stuff going on now without being reminded of last year’s horrors??”

The lectionary reading today is the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. At the heart of this scripture reading is a Christian understanding of how there could be evil on the one hand and a loving God on the other, and what we are called to do in the face of such evil.

The truth is there is never a great time to talk about things we’d rather avoid thinking about. Yes, there is plenty of evil that is fresh and raw right now, so why dredge up an older story? Because evil and suffering are a constant presence in our lives it’s important that we reflect on this faithfully. And sometimes it’s a little bit easier to reflect on something that maybe doesn’t hit so close to home.

In the parable that Jesus told, a landowner had a crop of wheat seeded. Despite the good efforts of the landowner to plant a good seed that would grow into good nourishing wheat, somehow weeds were sown into the crop and grew up alongside the wheat. The workers who actually did the work were upset. ‘How could this happen and what do we do about it?’, they ask.

This parable gives us some answers and leaves us with some mysteries too. How often have you asked why? Why do these problems exist in the world? Why is there evil and hurt and suffering in the world?

The parable clearly tells us that God, represented by the landowner, is good. God planted good seed. In fact, when the workers ask where the bad seed came from, the landowner says: “An enemy has done this”. This is the first thing that Jesus wants us to know when bad things happen: it is not God who has caused it. God is good. God doesn’t make bad things happen to teach us a lesson or to make us stronger or because it will be better in the long run in ways we cannot now understand. No, bad things happen because there is evil in the world and part of being fully human means growing up and living with that evil and with that pain.

It would take more time or another sermon to unpack more where the evil comes from. In this parable Jesus simply says: "An enemy has done this." For now, let us simply acknowledge that that there truly is an evil force in the world and it has nothing to do with God.

Why doesn't God do something about this evil? Why does God allow it? Why doesn't God just get rid of all evil and suffering now? Well this parable explains that if God went in and got rid of all the weeds, the wheat would be destroyed in the process. They might look separate on the surface but underneath the soil the roots of the weeds and the wheat are completely entangled.

We like to think of evil as being that thing or that person over there, but the truth is evil is inside each of us. The problem is that if God ripped out the evil around us, the good would also be eliminated. It's not just out there. It is also in here, in our own hearts. In order that good might flourish and mature, the evil can't be destroyed yet.

One day, the Bible says, God will wipe every tear from our eyes. One day, pain will be no more. One day heaven will come to earth and everything will be restored and made right. One day.

So if we can't do something radical like rip out the evil entirely now, what do we do about the hurt and the evil in the around us? Do we just watch Netflix and numb the pain and do our best to forget about it?

The answer to that is found in the two smaller parables. If you look at this parable in the gospel of Matthew, you can see that how it is structured gives us a clue to fully understand what we are called to do as Christians while we live in this in-between time, in the presence of great good and great evil. The structure goes like this: there is the story of the wheat and the weeds and then two short parables of the mustard seed and the yeast; and then the disciples come back to the parable of the wheat and the weeds when they ask Jesus to explain it. So, it looks a bit like a hamburger on its side: main story, smaller stories, main story.

The two little parables in the middle of the larger parable are the key. They are the two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese of the burger. (I'm getting hungry.)

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened. (Mt 13:32-33)"

Though the problem of suffering and evil will not be completely eradicated until the end of time, nevertheless in this in-between time we are called to work with God to bring good in small ways. The kingdom of God seems to bring goodness, healing, life and beauty in small, simple, sometimes subversive or unassuming ways. We as Christians are called to participate and partner with God in those small acts of goodness, justice and kindness because as we do, it grows and it spreads and it truly makes a powerful difference.

As I read a small and probably mostly overlooked story of the anniversary of that national tragedy, I was moved to learn that a man from Northern BC built a memorial spot on the side of

the highway to commemorate the lost lives of the young man and woman. Ed Grennan is a trucker who more than two decades ago lost his own daughter. For years the pain of his loss was unbearable ... so he was able to imagine what the parents of these people must be feeling. In the weeks that followed he set up a makeshift memorial on the highway and then a few months later built something more permanent. It has an American flag, an Australian flag alongside a floral cross. Sheila Deese, the young woman's mother, heard about the memorial and contacted Ed. Over the year they have spoken many times because she feels that he understands her pain. Partly because of Covid and partly because she's just not ready, Sheila has not visited the site yet, but she will one day and Ed will have made that visit just a little less painful. Ed says of the location: *"It's a beautiful area. I feel all the badness has gone out of there. There's nothing but love and goodness there now and—I guess—sorrow."*

In the face of unspeakable evil, Ed planted a small mustard seed of healing and love.

That's what God did too. In a world of incredible evil God sent his son to walk this earth for 33 short years in a remote part of the world. Jesus didn't avoid pain and suffering because he was God. Instead he chose to walk towards it and through it as he died on a cross.

We won't fully understand the why's of the presence of pain and evil on this side of life. But as we live as followers of Jesus, we are called not to hide or tune out from the evil, but instead to ask Jesus in prayer what one small thing we are called to do to bring more light and healing and life in this time and this place. I hope that this week you take time to pray about the one small thing you can do to partner with God in sowing good, good seeds. Thanks be to God. Amen.