

## A Parable of Weeds

pr 11 yr A July 19, 2020 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Black Lives Matter protests and rallies have continued in different part of the world since the march last month here in Antigonish. The heightened awareness of racism has brought about conversations about discrimination and prejudice in many places including professional sports where it was rarely mentioned or acknowledged. And with that growing awareness comes the important discussion of how to eliminate racism from our society and our world.

This morning's gospel lesson is another parable of Jesus about gardening. And like last week's story of the sower it is not difficult to follow. A field is planted with good seed and at some point other seeds are sown in the same field. The workers realize there is something wrong in the field and come to the landowner for wisdom on what to do about the weeds among the wheat.

And like last week there is also an explanation which helps us make some sense of the parable. And as I did before I'm going to focus more on the parable than the explanation because while the explanation gives us some insight it doesn't reveal all the meaning in the story Jesus tells.

Now like all the parables this isn't actually instructions about gardening. This is a story about God's will and way in the world. This is a story about faith and how we act and live as followers of Jesus. And unlike last week where we talked about how to let the will of God thrive in our lives this week the parable is about a faithful response to evil- what is wrong in us and the world.

And I don't want to get sidetracked talking about where evil comes from. Because while that is an interesting conversation the truth is that any conclusion we reach won't actually help us in the long run. Because our problem isn't why there is evil in the world but rather what do about the evil we face. We need to know how to act when there is wrong, sin, corruption in us, those around us, and the world. And the parable this morning has something interesting thing to say to us.

At the start of the parable the workers realize that there are weeds growing among the wheat, the desired crop. And their first impulse is to tear out the weeds. Which makes sense because quite frankly that is what I would want to do- get rid of the bad as quickly as possible. But the owner refuses to let the workers act because the roots are intermingled and says wait and leave the weeds alone until later. Now

remember gardening isn't the point of the story but Jesus tells it to help us better know God's will and way. And the truth is that sometimes we don't have the wisdom, the vision, the ability to directly deal with evil in our lives and our world.

I say that because sometimes we can't tell if something is good or bad. In our history there were times when we thought something we were doing was for the greater good, colonization and residential schools come to mind, and now we realize and see the great deal of harm and how evil those efforts really were. For evil is often intermingled with good intentions and we can't always tell which is which.

Yet the workers in this parable can tell wheat from weeds but their problem is that they can't separate the plants. Because sometimes we struggle figuring out where the root of the problem is. For instance we've started the conversation about racism and that is a very good thing. But getting rid of racism is not as simple as knowing that it is wrong. We need to figure out things like white privilege and all the places that is intermingled with the institutions and practices of our society.

But I'm not saying that we can't do anything in the face of evil while we are sorting out those difficult and complex things. We can always nurture the good even when there is evil present. And I know our first instinct is to oppose what is wrong but the truth is that if we help the good to grow strong enough sometimes it will extinguish the evil by denying it space to grow. Sometimes promoting and encouraging what is right and good is what is needed most to confront and deny evil that we are struggling to overcome.

And I think in our personal lives that is often the best way to deal with evil. Because the fact is that we are a combination of good and evil and when we try to get rid of the bad habits, ways of living we often struggle and backslide. But if we foster and develop the good that will take away the power from the evil. Do what is right as a way of denying what is wrong. Be part of the solution and you are not part of the problem.

And of course the parable doesn't tell us that we can never directly oppose evil. Remember even through initially the weeds are left alone while the workers can't deal with them the time comes when they can be eliminated. Because let's make no mistake about it that is how God will act on the day of judgement, the evil within

us and around us will be banished and not allowed to grow or continue in any way.

And there are occasions in our lives when in faith we have to do the same. We have to stand up and loudly say no. We have to refuse to allow evil to continue unchallenged in our lives and in our world. We have to separate the wheat from the chaff and get rid of what is wrong. And that opens up the opportunity not merely for us to make things better but to allow something new to begin.

Because when Jesus talks about the wheat being separated from the weeds he is talking about harvest time, an opportunity to collect the crop, discard what is unwanted, and then be ready for something new. For when the good is separated from the bad then the field is prepared for a next crop to begin the grow.

And looking around the world there are times and places where that needs to happen now. That is what is behind the protests around black lives matter and the awareness of the “Me Too” movement. A cry for us to get rid of the racism which has blighted out society and killed innocent people. A demand that men be held accountable for their actions toward women.

A time for us to realize there is a serious problem with our justice, healthcare, and government systems and that we need to separate out the bad from the good. Because only then can we begin to live in a world where blacks are not fearful of police, where young women are safe from harassment and abuse by men, and everyone is cherished, respected and prospers as God intends.

Because as people of faith we are told to recognize that there is evil in our lives and in our world. And that the problem of evil is complex and can only be addressed with wisdom, faith, and persistence. For Jesus calls us in the parable not to ignore what is wrong because it is too difficult for us to address but to be aware of it, to pray for wisdom and knowledge to know how to deal with it.

To foster what is right and good so that justice and righteousness can thrive. And that when the time comes to take the weeds out of the field to do that and to rejoice at the harvest of good which God has made prosper and flourish under the care of those who have worked and strived to make it grow.