

10th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 11
Matthew 13:24-30, 35-43
The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

What a privilege and a joy it is to worship with all of you this morning and with our dear Bishop, John-David Schofield! I have been full of anticipation all week although I must admit that under this alb my knees are shaking. This is not because of you, who are out there...but because of him...who is back there! I just know that our dear Bishop must have many, many sermons in his head, heart and soul on this very Gospel that he could deliver in an incredibly elegant way. So I ask you to pray for me!

The Parable in today's gospel is somewhat different than many of the other parables that Christ gave during His time on this earth. For this particular Parable, Christ gives an explanation of exactly what he was trying to teach. Instead of spending time re-telling you what Jesus has already told us, I would, instead like us to look at lessons from this Parable for our own lives today.

The first lesson is this: God expects the righteous and the wicked (the wheat and the weeds) to co-exist in this world until the end. This was probably a very difficult concept for the Jews to get their minds around. They wanted the Savior to come and immediately overthrow evil! Instead He was telling them that His Kingdom was at hand but had not

been completely fulfilled; that is wasn't time to overthrow evil and they would have to live through a period of time were the environment was far from ideal. Is He not telling us that very same thing today?

Jesus is telling us that we cannot retreat from the world around us but that we must coexist, side by side, even intertwined, as weeds and wheat sometimes are, with ungodly people. It is not unusual for many Christians to feel that the best way to grow is to find an ideal setting that is free of harassment and competition from the weeds and live there happily ever after. It certainly makes sense. Weeds hinder growth, but our Lord is telling us to grow together with the weeds! This includes people we worship with, people we work with, and people we play with...people, people everywhere...some of who might seem to us pretty "weedy."

Several years ago there was an advertisement in *Christianity Today* magazine for a special development being built in the State of Florida designed specifically for Christians. I don't know if the development ever got built but their ads were very enticing. They used using such words as "We cherish the ideals of church, family and community. For Christians who love being around other people who share their traditions and values, this is a wonderful place to worship, live, work, retire, or raise a family."

The message in that ad was clear: “Your Christian life would be much better off if you got rid of the weeds around you. You and your children would not have to contend with bad influences!” It really sounds great but in the Parable Jesus explained that he was the sower and he planted the seeds where He wanted them to live and grow. Not in some perfect place but right here...wherever right here is for each of us...Tracy, Modesto, Bakersfield...wherever.

However, the story also tells us that we are able to thrive in our environment. We know this because in the end of the Parable there is wheat to harvest. The weeds don't choke out the wheat. That's the miracle in this story. So we can get the job done in Tracy or Stockton or even Lodi. We can live and even bear fruit, right here in the midst of the weeds!

Another lesson we learn is one of patience; that we must restrain ourselves from the temptation to root out the weeds of the world NOW. We can't root out the weeds in the here and now. The Crusades certainly proved the futility of that idea. The parable tells us that as much as we may be distressed by what is going on around us, in our church, in our diocese in the Church at large that we must exercise patience and restraint.

At least the parable explains why! The farmer says that while we are gathering up the weeds we might root out some of the wheat with them! In other words, our weeding

efforts could do more harm than good. We can't be trusted with the weeding job yet because the harvest isn't ripe yet. As a result, some of the wheat might look like weeds.

When I was a little girl I used to spend a good part of the summer at my Grandmother's house. She lived in a great big house and everything she did and said simply fascinated me! I always wanted to please her. One day she gave me a little chore of pulling the weeds out of the pansy garden that grew around the flag pole. We went out together and she showed me what the weeds looked like and asked me if I could do it. I assured her that I most certainly could. I took great care to pull out every single green thingy that didn't have a flower on it. If it didn't have a flower, it must be a weed...right?

Well, needless to say, I pulled out a lot of pansies that hadn't bloomed yet in my weeding and while my dear grandmother did not yell at me...she never had me weed again either!

The bottom line is that we are not very good "weeders.": We don't know what is in a person's heart...only God knows that. Someone might "look" like they are a weed...maybe because their flower hasn't come out yet. However, there are probably going to be some really big surprises in heaven so we shouldn't waste any time on earth trying to figure out

who is in and who is out. We will always get in wrong so we need to admit our inability to weed properly.

We simply can't be trusted with the job of weeding. One of the reasons is because that some of the weeds we seek to pull out are actually growing within our own hearts! We need to leave the job with God. Jesus is saying, "Hand it over. Let me do this in my own good time." The great thing about this is that we don't have to worry about it anymore. If you have ever spent any time weeding your lawn or your garden you know that it is hard work and takes a lot of energy. So God says, "Be patient. Let me take care of it. At the same time, if we don't have to be concerned with the weeding then we can spend more time concentrating on the growth of the wheat!

It is really interesting that God is more patient with people than we are! God is slow in judging the wicked, because he longs for them to turn to him. God loves them! Our God lives weeds! And that's a good thing because of course we need to remember that we were all weeds once! God is restraining himself because of all of us; holding back the End because He doesn't want anyone to be lost! He is giving everyone space and time to change. He is so much more patient with the weeds than we are!

There is an old Jewish story about Abraham. Abraham was sitting outside of his tent one day when an old man

approached him. He was weary from his journey. Abraham welcomed him into his tent, washed his feet and gave him something to eat and drink. Abraham noticed that the old man ate without saying a prayer or blessing. Abraham asked him "Don't you worship God?" to which the old man replied "I only worship the fire." With that reply Abraham threw him out of the tent into the cold night. Later that evening God was walking with Abraham and asked Abraham where the old man had gone. Abraham said "I forced him out because he did not worship you." God replied, "O Abraham, I have suffered with him for 80 years. Could you not endure him just one night?" God is slow in judging the wicked...shouldn't we be as well??

And finally, the Parable teaches us that at the end of the age, Jesus himself will judge the wicked and reward the righteous. God is not morally neutral. There will come that day when all are judged. It is not here yet but it is coming. In the meantime, our job is not to retreat from evil, not to conquer evil but to be diligent in our pursuit of true godliness. We are to live humbly, patiently and righteously in the midst of the world, in the place where God, by his sovereign choice has planted us. As we do this, God has promised us that we will be part of a quiet revolution where, by his grace and power, people around us will be transformed from weed into wheat.

Part of our problem in accepting all of this is that we are constantly keeping our eyes on the weeds when they should be on the wheat. As the blessed St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians reminds us “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” In other words....Keep you mind and thoughts on the wheat and leave the weeds to God! Amen!