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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
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Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

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

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.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

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In 1984 an American rock music mockumentary, a film entitled “This is Spinal Tap” was released. The film portrays a fictional, British heavy metal band and it is wickedly funny.

I have too many favorite scenes in this movie to number, but one of my favorites is this. It comes at a time when the band has lost a lot of its popularity, so they develop this epic song, called Stonehenge, with the plan to have a lavish stage show, including a huge Stonehenge as a part of the set...wow everyone and rebuild their popularity. So a member of the band sketches out the set, but unfortunately uses double prime symbols for the measurements, instead of single prime...” The

resulting prop, seen for the first time by the group during a show, is only 18 inches high (instead of the intended 18 feet)”¹. During the song, it is lowered to the stage, ...and far from getting their mojo back, they become a laughing stock.²

The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry, as a paraphrase of the Robert Burns poem has it. No matter how carefully a project is planned, something can and usually will, go wrong with it.³

And so, a farmer sowed good seed in his field, but in the night, when everybody was asleep and no one was watching, a malevolent person went in and sowed weeds in the field...just to be mean. So when the plants grew up and bore grain, the weeds –which apparently looked a lot like the good grain plants- grew up too.

The immediate response of the slaves of the farmer was to say, “Do you want us to wade in and take out all the weeds?” But the farmer said, “No. I am sure you’d make your share of mistakes and pull up the good with the bad. Just leave it alone for now. At the harvest when it will be perfectly clear what is what, then we can separate the wheat from the weeds.”

Lots of times Jesus utters these great parables and just leaves them there for us to chew on. But this time, when requested, he offers an explanation. Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man...when he says, “The Son of Man is the one who sows the good seed...” he is claiming that role for himself. So Jesus is the farmer, the planter of good seed...and the world is the field. The good seed are the children of the kingdom of God, and the weeds are the children of the evil one, the devil, the satan, the adversary...that which is contrary to God and to goodness. The harvest is the end of this age and it leads to judgment, with all causes of sin and all evil doers receiving fire and the righteous shining like the sun in the kingdom.

This is a rich parable and brings a lot of things to my mind...starts a conversation, if you will. First off, it tells us what we perhaps already reluctantly admit, life is

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Is_Spinal_Tap

² <https://youtu.be/STHKFIO-zBw>

³ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/the-best-laid-plans-of-mice-and-men-often-go-awry>

messy. The best laid plans go awry. The world is messy. Our families are messy. The church is messy. You are, I am messy...You name it. Either through malevolence, personal sin, or just simple mistakes...life is a very mixed bag. And this bothers us.

As one commentator has it, “It chronically comes as a shock to find that the world, that the family into which we were born, that even the church is not an entirely trustworthy place. The world has places of wonder, but alleys of cruelty, too. Families cause deep pain as well as great joy. The church can be inspiringly courageous one moment and petty and faithless the next. Good mixes in with the bad. ‘Where did these weeds come from?’ is a perennial human cry.”⁴

It is natural to want to fix it, and to fix it now! But Jesus says, “Not so fast!” You think you know what you are doing, you think you can separate the good from the bad and make everything perfect, but you can’t. Go slow. Stop it with all the judgment.

Now, let me hasten to add that this is not a call to passivity. “It is not a divine command to ignore injustice in the world, violence in society, or wrong on the church. It is, rather, a realistic reminder that the servants do not finally have the ability to get rid of all the weeds and that sometimes attempts to pluck up weeds cause more harm than good. This is the way it is.”⁵ Slow down with all the judgment and instead embrace humility...be set free from false pride and arrogance.

With humility we are to work out and work through the tension that exists between tolerance and patience on the one hand, and the need for standards and discipline on the other.⁶ The Gospel puts these big concepts out there, but depends on us to figure it out from there.

⁴ The New Interpreter’s Bible, volume VIII, copyright 1995, pages 301-311.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

And, there is an end, there is a judgment, there is a new age. But this is God's work, not ours. Eugene Boring who is a professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School in Texas says it so well: "Evil is temporary; only the good endures. The parable leads finally, then, to a place of joy and hope. We live in an imperfect world, and no human effort can eradicate that fact. But that was never our job anyway. We are given the task of living as faithfully and as obediently as possible, confident that the harvest is sure."⁷ We humbly do our work and let God be God.

Now I could end it right here...but...I want to end by talking some about judgment...it is not something I talk about a lot, but it is certainly a part of today's parable. We tend to think that either there is a God of love or a God of judgment...that we must go one way or the other. Sometimes, people very erroneously say, the Old Testament God is a God of judgment and wrath while the New Testament God, is a God of love and grace. That is just wrong, as a reading of the Old and New Testaments will reveal.

The truth is, upheld in Scripture, Judgment and love or Judgment and grace are two sides of the same coin and both are part of God's relationship with us. We want God's love, of course. But the fact of the matter, whether we consciously realize it or not, we crave God's judgment. What I mean is we want God to sort things out, to bring justice, to heal the wounds, to make things right...and that is what judgment means.

But we can't think about this simplistically, or in black and white categories. In the parable which talks about a field at harvest time, it is easy to see what is weed and what is wheat. In human communities, and at any time, now or on judgmentday nothing is just one thing. There is no such thing as pure wheat or pure weeds...inside a community and in fact inside each individual, there is wheat and weeds. We are all hybrids. Everything is a hybrid. It is all mixed up.

So the judgment is something that slices through every community and every person...it does not cut around people...but cuts through them. It cuts through me and it cuts through you. So when we yearn for judgment, it ends up not just being other people who get put right, it ends up not being just about the world or the

⁷ ibid

community or the church...it ends up being also about you and me. So it is all those things.

Or as one theologian has it, "Judgment can be thought of as a kind of sifting, whereby the distortions of evil are brought to defeat and dissolution and the tendencies toward authentic being are advanced."⁸

There is an ultimate or final judgment, but it also happens all along the way. As another theologian says, "...our Christian life here is full of...sufferings, of daily dyings, it is also full of daily resurrections and great joy."⁹ That experience is the experience of judgment. The hope and the promise of the parable of the weeds, is that one day, the judgment is fully and finally done, and God is all in all.

Now you may ask, "What about hell?" <Well, if there is a new heaven and a new earth, then Christian faith demands a logical opposite. That doesn't necessary mean that anyone has to be in hell, but hell is needed as a logical opposite.>¹⁰

CS Lewis, in his book *The Great Divorce*, portrays "Hell as a place from which anybody can go to Heaven anytime they want to. All they have to do is just catch the bus and ride up to Heaven! Their only problem is that when they get to Heaven they don't like it a bit. For Heaven is a place where people are who have been remade, transformed into the image of God. They are therefore unselfish people who live in harmony with other unselfish people; so if a selfish person gets into Heaven, it is Hell (for that person)."¹¹ Or, more succinctly put, "The door to hell locks from the inside."

So...this indeed is Spinal Tap...this is our funny, tragic, challenging, joyful, fulfilling, desperate and amazing world.

Make your peace with the fact that the world, your family, your church...you, we ...are not pure, not perfect, not as planned...everything is all wheat and weeds mixed together.

⁸ John Macquarrie, "Principles of Christian Theology" Second edition, copyright 1977, page 364.

⁹ Albert Mollegen, "Christianity and Modern Man: The Faith of Christians", nine lectures, copyright 1954, page 90.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *Ibid* page 90-91

It shall not always be so, and through our own daily dying and rising to life again, we can anticipate the day when all shall be put right. Until then, unfurrow your brow and do not be quick with your judgments. Instead, work faithfully and with humility. Evil is temporary. Only the good will endure. Let anyone with ears to hear, listen.