I wondered what this text would sound like to someone that didn’t hear Sheryl’s sermon last week. To someone that believes in God, but has issues with organized religion and consequently does not attend church with any regularity, doesn’t join in studies, keeps religious discussions at arms-length for various reasons.

So I asked. Three different people. All fine upstanding citizens. All believe in God. All pray in some way or another. But none are a part of a church family. I wondered if we heard things differently. With varying degrees of formal education and different levels of social interaction and community engagement, they each had their own take, with some layover.

I asked only for first impressions, without googling the text and reading a commentary.

The first reply came quickly:

* Don’t be so quick to react.
* What appears to be initial discourse could have future benefits.
* One’s enemy should not change your direction.

The second reply was in more of a short essay form:

* Avoid judging others – While evil certainly does exist, if we take it on ourselves to rid the world of evil more than likely a lot of good people will get destroyed in the process.  It’s not our place to decide who is a weed and who is wheat (good or evil).  The harvesters (God) will make that decision at the time of judgement. I also interpret a message of living in peace with your neighbors regardless of how different their views may be.  An easily understood message, that I think all of us have a difficult time following.

The response last was quite succinct:

* Take good with bad
* Bad can have good
* Bad can lead to good
* Accept others whether a weed or a good seed

There are certainly some common themes in their replies regarding judgement and living together in peace, which are spot on. Some other viewpoints I may not share. What I found missing though, was an acknowledgement of the degree to which evil goes to, to pull us astray, thus our need to be vigilant, our calling to be Children of God, not just good people.

This parable is much of an allegory, showing a one to one correlation between the text and its meaning.

The parable starts out, right off the bat, likening Jesus spreading the Gospel to a man sowing good seed. This differs from last week where the seed represented the Word. Much like the way wheat was considered the choicest grain, these good seeds were his actual chosen ones, the Children of God.

The field *is the world as we know it.*

Everyone sleeping – doesn’t that have to represent our blind eye to the plight of the world? So much happening around us, right underneath our fingertips, on our watch.

The enemy – we know who he is. And this is the part that really jumped out at me in the three replies I referred to at the beginning. As part of a Christian community, we are keenly aware and regularly reminded of the devious methods the evil one uses to corrupt us, dissuade us, persuade us, and seduce us. He is tricky, manipulative, and downright sneaky. I am often reminded of Wormwood from CS Lewis’ Screwtape Letters.

My wife now uses an expression my mother used to use when she’s sees herself being pulled sideways. “Devil get behind me.”.

Evil attempted to destroy this farmer’s livelihood, damage his reputation, and diminish the respect his workers had for him. This wasn’t merely a few seeds of weeds that had blown in or were dropped erroneously by birds flying over. This was a poisonous weed. One commentary explains that, “Matthew uses the Greek term *zizania*, which in modern botanical terms refers to the genus of wild rice grasses. What Matthew most likely refers to, however, is bearded darnel or cockle, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and real wheat is evident only when the plants mature and the ears appear.”

This weed that was sown represents those that do not have Christ in their heart. I am chagrin to say, *children of the evil one*, which is what several texts used. One commentary addressed my struggle with the expression in this way:

“Now these too are persons that are sown. They are what Jesus calls "the sons of the evil one." They too have been scattered throughout the human race by the enemy -- and especially among the wheat. We will see more about that in a moment.

I know that there is a sense in which the whole world, as the Scriptures tell us, is under the control of satanic philosophy and thought. Jesus referred to the devil as the ruler of this world because he governs the thinking of people. But, in the light of this parable, I think it is wrong to think of everybody in the world, men, women, and children alike, as "sons of the evil one." Jesus never called anybody a son of the devil except the Pharisees who were teachers of evil in the name of righteousness. That was what he called a son of the devil -- someone who pretended to be religiously correct but was actually disseminating wrong, evil, error.

It is true that we are all members of a fallen race. We are all born into this world tainted with Adam's sin so that we all tend toward evil naturally. No one has to teach you how to lie. Did you ever go to school to learn that? Do you have a diploma to show that you have successfully accomplished training in *How To Be Selfish*? No, you learn all this naturally. You never have to be trained in how to be dishonest, how to cheat, how to be a hypocrite. We are all natural hypocrites, and experts at it, because we are members of a fallen race. But babies could hardly be called "sons of the evil one" in the sense our Lord intends here.”

Moving on, it is noteworthy that it didn’t become evident that the field had been infested until the plants began to mature, until their roots were entangled. This is said to be a foreshadowing of the future state of things. All messy, good and bad indiscernible.

26When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 28"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

On a side note, when I did a word study, a comparison of the words used in differing translations, there were two sentences that were virtually identical throughout the translations.

The first was, “An enemy has done this.” He was emphatic. He knew, without question what had transpired.

The second was the solution. “Let them both grow together until the harvest.”

Because we hear and study the word together, words like enemy and harvest should speak to you boldly, with the enemy speaking about the actions of Satan and the harvest referring to the end of days, when Jesus returns.

Because we hear the deeper meaning, we are called to respond more intentionally. The message is more than, “be nice to your neighbor, for you don’t know if he is a good seed or a weed and it isn’t your place to tend to him.”

Many of us hear the passages about salvation and only the chosen ones being called forth to join the Father, and we struggle with that idea. Passages such as Luke 13:23-25 23Someone asked him, "LORD, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.

But as the sower wisely tells his servants, “while you are willing to pull the weeds you may uproot the wheat.” The same could be said of the weeds, in terms of it not being our place to decide whether they are good or bad. The harvesters (otherwise known as the angels) will take care of that. You never know when someone might see the Light and turn to God.

This whole parable speaks to our daily lives and how we interact with each other. None of us is pure and free of sin. We like to think of ourselves as good seeds, and if it be true, it is only by the grace of God and his forgiveness of our sins, only when we accept Christ as our savior and recognize that we cannot save ourselves.

 So the sowers solution to this coexistence is not extermination, nor separation. One commentary summed it up nicely, “So do we do nothing? Just sit and wait? No, that’s not what Jesus is saying. There is plenty to do and it will be a challenge. The words that are translated as “let them” in Jesus’ statement, “Let them grow…” can also be translated as forgive them. It’s the same words Jesus spoke from the cross in St. Luke’s account of the gospel when he says, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). Even then, even on the cross, Jesus is unwilling to pull up the weeds.”

We may be able to go so far as to say that doing nothing is actually doing something, as opposed to nothing being done. This wise advice was actually used prior to World War II, when Richard Niebuhr argued for patient faith instead of action against Japan for invading Manchuria. It was call, “The Grace of Doing Nothing.”

Pastor Mark Davis warns us that, “There are times when doing nothing is ethically necessary because the unintended consequences of doing something (anything!) in the face of evil can often end up destroying the very thing one is trying to preserve. It was a profound albeit a losing argument in 1933, followed quickly by a retort from his brother Reinhold entitled, “Must We Do Nothing?” That question, “Must we do nothing?” is ever the retort against the parable of the wheat and weeds. Yet, the owner’s wisdom proves remarkable time after time. In trying to rid the world of global terror, not only have countless innocent lives been lost or shattered, but every act of overreach against terrorism seems to become convincing propaganda for producing more terrorists. Richard Niebuhr’s insight—the insight of this parable—proves itself tragically over and over.

In the sphere of political decision-making, ‘the grace of doing nothing’ is usually a losing proposition. Certainly one could argue that the Christian church has never taken it as an article of faith. Typically when sabers rattle, the church rallies with them. But this parable, with its unlikely phrase, “An enemy has done this,” invites even the angriest reactionary to consider the complexity of wheat and weeds, good and bad, us and them.”

Ryan will dig deeper into the harvest and the harvesters, next week, for this is a prelude to the end of times. It give us an opportunity to look into our own lives, the life of our congregation and how we coexist in a largely unchurched community and consider the big picture, the long range plan. Never forgetting, that we should be diligent in keeping watch, lest evil creep in and turn things upside down. When you consider the command to Love one another, are you being patient and kind, or are you trying to simplify things by weeding out some of those neighbors? When you try to live out the great commission that tells us to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*, are your eyes and hearts open to Gods leading, telling the devil to get behind you when the urge comes to dismiss someone you aren’t sure about.

Christ acts first and we respond. And sometimes that response is silence. Sometimes it isn’t. But are you the lucky dog, to have tools in your tool box, like prayer and discernment, the Word, fellow Christians to bounce your ideas, a pastor and a church family, all here to equip you in ways others don’t know, but they will see. They will see your actions and responses to situations and when you choose to respond in a manner different than the masses, and they ask you why – there is your opportunity to tell them about your tool box and how those tools cause you to see things and respond a little differently.