

St Pius-St Anthony 16th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

What a prank we hear about in today's gospel. Someone takes on a stealth operation to go and sow weed seed all through a neighbor's planted field. Now, that takes time. Then, we hear from the master that he suspects an enemy has done it, but we do not know that enemy's motive. Maybe, vengeance for some perceived grievance, or to greedily corner the local wheat market that year (taking out his competition-like what happens everyday in modern oil or tech markets) But regardless, now we have a problem in the field. This reminds of what tricksters or pranksters do. I can think of brothers pulling such tricks. Someone told me this once about this. A guy meticulously prepares a sandwich, chips and dip, sets it on the table and then goes across the room to turn on the TV. Meanwhile, someone in the group slips in and takes a big bite out of the sandwich and putting back on plate! One way to get it! Or another version of this is when a two brothers are sitting at the kitchen bar and one is getting into a packet of cupcakes, and the other one asks 'Can I have one?' The first says after biting into one of them, 'Oh, would you like this one, or oh how about (and then licking the other one) this one?' No, that is cruel, we say, would someone do that? But we know that is not a way to go about feeding the hungry. So, how about this weeds and wheat parable? What neighbor would purposely sabotage another farmer's crop by planting weeds all through it? It is the mystery of sin and evil. But such mischievous we can find examples of in the Bible. One of the most shocking pranks I find in the Old Testament comes from the book of Judges chapter 15. Now in no way, am I condoning this attack or its motive. No one should try this anywhere. We hear about Samson the long haired-strong armed warrior, who is slighted by a Philistine father-in-law, and Samson comes up with this prankish attack to get back. Judges 15:4-6 says " *Samson went and caught three hundred jackals, and turning them tail to tail, he took some torches and tied one between each pair of tails. He then kindled the torches and set the jackals loose in the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning both the shocks and standing grain, the vineyards and olive groves. Then the Philistines asked, "Who has done this?"* Can you believe that? How did he even come up with that & make it work? If jackals are anything like our dogs, how did he successfully tie their tails together? My point is that the occurrence of such prankish attacks would be in the scripture tradition that Jesus could be invoking with this parable today. So, what is Jesus' point in telling this and the other two parables of the small mustard seed and the woman kneading yeast into dough. Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like these parables. How is it like them? I suggest that when Jesus groups parables like these, we should look for the common or parallel element running through them. All three do involve being patient for the fruit of the kingdom to come about. Patience and perseverance bring about grace. Wait for it, wait for it.

To me, the coming of the kingdom of God means that evil will be overcome. That God and the good will rule (kingdom), means that evil is vanquished or eliminated or redeemed. Evil will be converted to good. But that takes time. All three of these parables involve patient waiting (oh, there is work while you wait too). In the parable, remember the details of growing crops. There are the still needed & constant checks on the field, even with weeds mixed in. We have to check for bug or worm pests, and then watch field water and drainage. Work in the dough and yeast parable involves the task of kneading the yeast into the bread (working it in). And the mustard seed requires the patient tending and watching over the huge growth and expanse of its branches (maybe trimming them or propping them up). So, even while waiting, there is work to be done so that a yield of fruit will come, and good overcome evil in the harvest. All three parables involve an element of this work or growth happening in a hidden or unseen way (like the seed germinating good into a fruit harvest). Don't give up, you don't see results now, and you won't for a little while; but keep at it, be patient and eventually the good fruit appears. For example, take the mustard seed. The parable gives me the impression that if you are after catching a bird, you can use that one seed maybe to bait-trap-capture one bird, or you can let that mustard seed grow with time, and become a huge bush that attracts how many birds and nests and eggs and more birds? But you have to wait for it. We see the same with the dough and yeast. You can go ahead and bake up that simple flour and water and get a little cracker. Or wait and massage that yeast in, (let it do its work) and then you have a more palatable bread-it may stretch along much further too. But, let's go back to the original parable of the weed prankster. Imagine being in the parable. We did the hard work of preparing the ground and planting good seed. And suddenly, we discover patches of weeds mixed in. Now what? I like how the good hard working servants, volunteer themselves, 'Do you want us to go in and pull out those weeds?' But the owner is wise. He has lived a while. Likely, he has pulled his share of weeds and knows the greater damage that is possible. And I bet he knows his workers too. They may be like charging bulls in china shops, and he knows they will ravage the good crop too, trampling through the field exterminating the weeds. So he suggests being patient. Let's wait and see. Watch the crops growing together. Maybe we make some small interventions here and there through the season, but we will have the harvest time to truly sort out the good from the bad; the wheat from the weeds. For now, we keep focused on the good, continuing our normal wholesome work and we will bear fruit in the end. The time for sorting will come later, and God and His angels will lead it.

As I mentioned last week, this is the second of only two parables that Jesus goes to the detailed lengths to explain its parts. He breaks down the elements and provides an interpretation. I like how he uses this story to give a practical explanation of ***why there is evil in the world*** and how to handle the presence of

evil, making it through this growing season we call life. If we are wheat, we have to grow and make it among the weeds around us. That's life. A world without sin and evil: that left us a long time ago. We have the world we do (fallen world) and we must make the best of it, and keep good ourselves (not be dragged into the weeds-not have our food and inner life nourishment drawn away from us by the presence of weeds). But remain faithful to God, persist in good works and keep lighted the Christ-flame of faith in what may be a darkening world surrounding us. The weeds are out there; but remain good wheat. Grow and remain rooted in Christ. What grows beside us doesn't matter, it is what our roots are grown into that matters. And that will allow us the fruit of good redeeming evil and bearing the harvest that truly gives God glory.