

*Proper 11, July 23, 2017*

*Holy Spirit, Cumming*

Another parable about seeds! If you were not here last Sunday, then you missed it. But last week we heard the famous parable about the Sower and how he spreads his seeds—the message of God’s love—on all types of soil—that is, all sorts of people with various limitations.

We learned we need to be more like the sower and focus on spreading the seeds of God’s love; and worry less about our soil—our limitations-- or the soil of our neighbors.

This week, we have a related issue in the Gospel. The sower is out doing his good work again—spreading the seeds of God’s love. The crop seems to be doing well. But then something happens—an enemy of God and God’s message of love

sneaks in and plants another message.

Jesus doesn’t specify what it is exactly. What we know about the weeds and the wheat is that they really look very much alike. That is the insidious part of this dishonest action done by the enemy of God’s love.

Like the message last week, the obvious question is “What do we do about it?” Many of us, including me, like to do something when we see a problem. That impulse is not wrong, necessarily. But it is not always the proper response.

In this case, Jesus said that the best strategy is **to wait**. His concern is that if his helpers get too concerned with weeding out what’s bad, they could very easily destroy some of what is good.

The translation from parable to real life is apparent. Perhaps

especially in our world today, many of us see the world as weeds and wheat in our fields.

Regardless of which side we are on, in the church or in politics or in society in general, we experience a much divided world. We see this expressed especially in new communication technology like Facebook and Twitter. What is hard to say to someone in person is something many now do from a keyboard.

And it is having an effect on our common discourse and our ability to work together as people of faith and as Americans. We wonder what will come of us as a people—will we divide into permanent opposing camps? Some people even discuss secession and civil war.

We may think that is unlikely—I hope it is—but we as people of faith need to pray and explore ways to

build bridges and live together and work for the common good.

And this parable gives us some direction on how we do that. The *first* and most important message is don't try to figure out which plants are wheat and which are weeds. Just like with soil in last week's Gospel, we are not particularly good at figuring out which is which.

Jesus said that God is leaving that harvest of wheat and weeds to the angels at the end of time. In *this* time in which we live, we need to focus on other things that are more fruitful for the work we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ. More about that in a minute.

The *second* and related message is to **be patient**. Patience is a virtue that we don't talk about much anymore as a society. Patience is hard. It involves giving up immediate control. It involves

humility. It requires good cheer in our encounters with people we might tend to see as weedy.

None of these patient responses are easy, frankly. All of these responses require us to pray and rely on God's help and grow mature in our character. **And** all of them will bear good fruit in ways that are worth the effort.

Because becoming angry—yanking a weed out of the field, so to speak—is not helpful for the work God is doing. We may be premature and mistakenly remove a stalk of wheat that is just going through a weedy stage.

God is at work in all of our lives and only God know what is going to happen with any of us in the fullness of time. Patience acknowledges that truth and calls us to live, work, and pray based on that humility and trust in God's judgment.

I have never regretted not saying something to someone when they have pushed my buttons. I have regretted speaking out at the wrong time and in the wrong way, out of being angry or annoyed.

I am not saying there is never a time to speak out—but I think we need to pray and engage someone as a human being before we attack them over what we see as wrong in their beliefs or behaviors.

You see, there are real weeds in the field of our world. This parable is not about relativism and that everything that everyone believes and does are equally righteous. No. There is right and wrong and there will be a final judgment. But it is not our job to judge. Rather we are to discern what we—our community—are to do positively to bring health and healing to our world.

The best way to discern what we are to do is through prayer in community; in studying the Gospels and the Hebrew prophets; and in taking actions congruent with what we learn.

What matters includes mercy and justice and forgiveness. **All** that is true. Yet to live consistent with that belief in Jesus and the prophets, it requires us to act and speak with care and compassion and clarity so that our words and actions scatter the seeds of God's love instead of the weeding actions of our personal opinions.

Let me give you an example.

Some of you know there is a division in the Anglican Communion, both globally and within the United States. It is a classic wheat and weeds story. One group—they call themselves the Anglican Church in North America—is more conservative

in their interpretation of the Bible and that especially forms their views on sexuality as well as some other hot button issues.

The other group—our group—is The Episcopal Church (TEC). We are actually the historical expression of Anglicanism in this country. We are the province of the Anglican Communion recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury. TEC is generally more liberal about how we interpret the Bible and that makes TEC more progressive about various social issues including sexuality.

These differences make us see the other church as “weedy.” There can be a tendency to insult each other as a group. We point out what is wrong with the other church and sometimes ignore what we share in common and what good we can do together. Some of us would prefer to yank out those weeds in “our” church so to speak.

It is complicated and I think both sides are at fault. We have seen our conflict spill over into secular court cases that are not a good witness to the grace of the gospel.

But just this week I heard a story from our missionaries in Honduras to help change our perspective. Someone they know from Honduras, a fifteen year old boy that they call “Eduardo” for his protection (i.e., it is not his real name), had come to the U.S.

Imagine what he must have gone through to get here at that age. He lives in California and was shot and paralyzed from the waist down. His family is afraid to visit him because of their immigration status and their fear of being deported. Can you imagine experiencing all that?

So our missionary called a priest from that other church, the one Episcopalians might be tempted

to see as a weed. And the priest she called immediately went to Eduardo’s side and comforted him and prayed for him and brought him the grace of Christ in the midst of the storm Eduardo was going through.

When Eduardo was tempted to feel abandoned by God, the Lord sent his angel to care for him and remind him of God’s love. That is some real wheat work right there.

So there are layers of potential “weeds” in this story—places where we could get distracted with what’s right and wrong versus what the gospel of Christ calls us to do. We could get distracted by immigration policies, gun violence, gangs, as well as which church is the best representation of Anglicanism in America. And in some settings all those issues need to be discussed and wise actions need to be taken.

Yet none of those issues are things we need to react to by trying to rip out what we see as “weeds.” This Anglican priest’s response of love and care was the right one in the moment to bear witness to what we are to be about as followers of Jesus Christ.

So how does that fit in our lives? When have we been tempted to write off someone as a “weed”? When have we gone so far as to rip those weeds out of our lives, so to speak? Written off a friendship or family member? Refused to engage in ministry because we don’t agree with helping “those people”? Perhaps valued our political point of view without examining it in light of the truth of the gospel?

The list of where we can get “in the weeds” is long. Our work as people of faith, as followers of Jesus Christ, is to not react in anger in the moment but rather pray first and

engage people and love them-- and let them love us, too.

If we are able to do that—pray, love and be loved—we will discover a different type of harvest in our lives and in the wider world. We will be less concerned with being right and more concerned with being there for people, like that Anglican priest was there for Eduardo. It may shake up how we see the world and how we live our lives. And I believe it will also bring us great joy. Amen.