

## **The Reckoning Is Now!**

### **A Sermon for The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**

*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!* Matthew 13:43

The question is as old as humanity, the anguish and bewilderment that prompts it as real today as it has always been. Why does evil appear to prosper? For that matter, why does God permit the wrong and the right to co-exist at all? In this morning's Gospel, Jesus seeks to explain God's reasons.

He relates a parable about an otherwise fruitful field that overnight has been sown with weeds the work, he's told, of an 'enemy.' The servants of the landowner quite reasonably ask if they should uproot the weeds in order to save the healthy growth. Their master says no, for such a measure might destroy the good growth along with the bad. Wait till the harvest-time, he tells them, for then they'll be able safely to separate the wheat from the weeds, the fruitful from the destructive.

Later, Jesus explains to his disciples that the good seed, sown by the Son of Man (himself) are the children of God's kingdom, and the weeds are the children of the evil one. At God's harvest-time, the Son of Man will send his angels to collect out of his kingdom 'all causes of sin and evildoers' who then will be thrown 'into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' In other words (if I understand Jesus correctly), there will be a reckoning both a vanquishing of all that has sought to poison and impede fruitful growth AND a vindication of those that have persevered, that have resisted evil and have sought to nourish the good. They, the righteous, will shine, Jesus declares, 'like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'

It's customary to think of such a time of reckoning as the last judgment, as in the coming of Christ on the last great Day. But what if he means for that reckoning and vindication to occur now? What if the present time we are living in and struggling through IS the appointed time of his coming? What if NOW is the day of judgment or at least a fair enough day until that other, final day comes along when (in the words of the hymn) 'right shall triumph over wrong, and truth shall be extolled?' Is the harvest of God and his angels happening at this very moment? And if so, how are we to welcome it and work for its fulfillment?

I'm having all of these (probably) heretical thoughts as I'm reflecting on the passing Friday of the great civil rights leader and revered congressman John Lewis. I won't recount the many details of his heroic life other than to point to perhaps the single

episode in his life that came to epitomize both his commitment and his courage in the cause of human freedom.

As a young man in his twenties he was beaten close to death by police attempting to halt a peaceful march in support of Black voter registration in Selma, Alabama in 1965. His skull fractured, his body bleeding and requiring emergency treatment, John Lewis lived to march again and to speak and work for racial justice alongside Martin Luther King and Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson. He was the last surviving speaker to have addressed the crowd at the March on Washington in 1963. Later elected from Georgia's 5th District, he served over thirty years in the U.S. House of Representatives. On matters of equal justice and individual liberty, he was called the 'conscience of Congress.' Although he would seldom admit it, the pain from his near-fatal injury many decades before never fully left him.

So, what does the life and now passing of John Lewis have to do with Jesus' parable of the wheat and weeds? And what can it tell us about a time of reckoning, a time of vindication in the ancient struggle between right and wrong, between what nourishes life and what seeks to destroy it, that struggle which continues to daunt us, particularly in matters of race, up to this very hour?

It tells me that, as the humble courage of John Lewis showed, we cannot wait to let God sort things out for us. By that I mean, we cannot go along passively believing that in time all will be well, and that all we can do now is to sit back and anticipate God's final judgment. The thing is, we already know what is right and good, what gives life and what takes it away. We already are able to distinguish the weeds from the wheat. And we know that both, for now, grow side by side in our world.

John Lewis knew that, but it never deterred him. His wounds were the price he was willing to pay for the moral redemption of his country, the cost, he said, of getting into 'good trouble.' Jesus knew that as well, of course, and yet he called his followers (among them John Lewis) to live with integrity and believe with courage, and finally to work with hope in the very midst of that divided world saving all that can be saved (even loving the enemy that sows the wrong), but knowing always where the true treasure lies, and fighting always, without violence or rancor and with God's help, to preserve it.

So, is the reckoning I'm speaking of, in the end, our own? Is it a self-reckoning in which we allow God to free us both from despair and indifference, from feelings of fear and helplessness AND the all-too-present desire to escape into comfort and forgetting? Perhaps today IS the day that God's harvest is to be gathered, and we, albeit sinful children of the kingdom, should not be caught idle. Not when heroes like John Lewis

have been our examples. Not when the work he strove to accomplish, and for which he risked his life, remains unfinished. Not when the promise of rebirth of a re-founding of our nation's ideals and purpose is within our grasp, as I believe it is. And not when the God of love, manifested in Christ, has shown each of us the ways to shine in love, like the sun, for the good of our land and of all the earth. Amen.

Blessings,

Fr. Gordon +