



July 19, 2020

Good Morning,

Welcome to worship on this July 19th. The Gospel readings from Matthew last week, this week, and next Sunday too are parables. Parables are short illustrative stories meant for teaching by way of causing one to think deeply about their meaning. Jesus used parables a lot to express the purpose and nature of God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom for Jesus was not a place, but a way of thinking and being that brings forth God's intention and desire. Most times, Jesus' understanding of God's Kingdom puts us back on our heels. We find, through Jesus' parables, that the way God thinks and what God desires can confound us. Often times it has to do with a radical grace of incredible abundance.

Jesus didn't live in a "black & white" world where everything was clear-cut. God did not create a world of exact boundaries and divisions. Such a world often times violates our human sensibilities. We like things plain and simple ... *"keep it simple"*, *"cut to the quick"*, and *"don't make it complicated"* are common phrases we use and hear that express our desire for exactitude. Sorry ... the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds that we focus on today offers us no such certainty. Instead of coming away from the message today with some spiritual jewel of precision, try coming way from this parable with the knowledge that God's grace lives in the midst of the messy contradictions that define all of us on some level. The key here is the focus on grace ... *Let them grow up together until the harvest* ... these are the words of the parable that contain the message of grace. I know that around these words, that are a harbinger of grace, there is a tone of judgement ... *"bind them up in bundles to be burned"*. Do not let this distract you from the radical grace this parable proclaims.

Have a meaningful and thought-provoking worship experience today. Ponder the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds as you go about your days and week to come. May God's blessings and spirit accompany you on the journey.

Pastor Rick

WORSHIP July 19, 2020

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WINQwOudy7w>

(To read the service with a written sermon from Pastor Rick, continue on from here)

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP - “*Gather Us In*” (verse 1) Kristan Youn

CALL TO WORSHIP

Gather us in, Lord, to the light of this day.

Bring us together with our fears and joys, our hopes and dreams to hear the sound of your name.

Gather us in, Lord, all of us ... feed us and make us your own.

Bring us together and give us the heart to be light for the whole human race.

Gather us in, Lord, fill us with the fire of your spirit to bring love to the world.

Here in this place new light is streaming, now is the darkness vanished away.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

Lord have mercy.

We have missed the mark of your desire for our lives.

Christ have mercy.

We have not turned ourselves around from patterns of living contrary to your will.

Lord have mercy.

Forgive, renew, and guide us into a newness of life in Christ Jesus.

God forgives, Christ renews, and the Holy Spirit guides us to life anew.

Live now, as the redeemed People of God.

GREETING

The Lord be with you.

We gather in the name of Jesus.

In Jesus, we are one for ministry and service.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st Reading – Isaiah 44:6-8

*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:*

*I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.*

*Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.*

*Who has announced from of old the things to come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.*

*Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?*

You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?

There is no other rock; I know not one.

2nd Reading – Psalm 86:11-13

*Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name for ever.
For great is your steadfast love towards me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

Gospel reading – Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

He put before them 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!

SERMON

5th after Pentecost

LIVING TOGETHER
Matthew 13:24-30

July 19, 2020

I know I just had a birthday, it was last Sunday, July 12th ... but I'm not showing you this picture painted of me and one of my dogs from years past



to better reminisce about my younger days when I was able to be more athletic and physically active.

It is a painting

of an actual moment in time when I would stretch with my Golden Retriever, ALF, before going out with her for a run.

Actually, this was a routine that ALF and I always went through before taking that daily jog ... ALF, as most any dog would, loved to go out and run with me.

Before going though, I would do a stretching routine, like you see in the painting.

When doing this, ALF would know that I was getting ready to go.

And in the midst of doing the stretching,

I would hug and hold ALF just like you see in the painting ... and she would whine and make those anxious dog sounds throughout the whole stretching routine.

Now, one might think

she was making those noises out of anxious excitement that we were soon going ... but

actually, I was teasing her and saying in her ear – *“You’re not going.”*

“You have to stay here.”

“You can’t go ... You have to stay”

Now most dogs, and ALF surely did ... most dogs know the command to STAY.

I would get her excited with the stretching and all, getting her to

think we were going to run soon and then tease her that she could not come with me, that she had to stay ... and *“boy”* did she whine.

I would actually stop giving her the hug like you see in the painting,

Tell her to STAY (which she would), and then begin to trot down the road telling her to STAY as I was running off.

I would do that for at least ten steps or so ... then I would stop, turn around, and say *“OK come on”* and she would make a mad dash toward me and off we would go.

Pretty mean ... right?

I tell you about that sinister side of myself because I want you

to know that I have some weeds growing inside here (pointing to myself) ... in other words, though

I have some good soil inside that can produce good fruit, I also have some weeds.

And so it goes for all of us ... right?



Most of us know there are weeds growing
in the garden that we call our lives ... No one's perfect.
We're all sinners ... those
are a couple of the common phrases that express the idea.

We also know

that in the world generally, there are people who engage in *“weedy”* activity (shall we say)

How many of you have had your email “hacked” or you’re credit card account compromised where unauthorized purchases were made on your account even though your card was never taken out of your wallet?

At the same time, we know there are those who

are quite the opposite of all that, they are the salt of the earth people, honest, filled with

integrity ... The person who tells the cashier that *“You gave me too much change”*

OR

The person who stops and helps fix your flat tire.

The person who volunteers at the food pantry.

We, all of us ... the whole world is filled with both weeds and wheat Right?

This brings us to the parable we hear today from Matthew’s 13th chapter.



This parable is not about the weeds that inhabit our vegetable or flower gardens, or about weeds you'll find in the forest or on rural hillsides.

This parable is about the weeds
that bring havoc,
discord, and
brokenness to ourselves and to the world as a whole.

When Jesus told this parable ... many

biblical scholars believe he told it in a briefer way that would still contain the nucleus
of the parable itself ... he may have told it like this:

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. When the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, then the weeds showed up. "Do you want us to pull-up the weeds" the [servants] asked him? "No, he answered, because as you gather the weeds you might pull-up some of the wheat along with them." (Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, p. 303, 304)

In this same chapter, chapter 13 of Matthew,

Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower where the sower indiscriminately threw seeds everywhere
and the seeds fell onto all kinds of soil, some good and some not so good.

The farmer in the crowd
hearing this parable, would wince at such a poor farming technique of throwing seeds
everywhere with no care for the type of soil upon which the seeds were falling.

Same thing this week, the farmer in the crowd would wince
at the practice of not getting rid of the weeds in one's field ... good farmers and good
gardeners do their weeding, do they not?

When we get such obvious misrepresentations of expected
practice or behavior in Jesus' parables ... it's a good clue
that he's up to revealing something about God that ruffles
our sensibilities.

Earlier in Matthew's 13th chapter it was God showering "*Kingdom Seeds*" even on
the not so fertile soil in our lives or even upon those who's soil we might consider to be bad
soil ... God sows seeds for faithfulness there anyway, in the hope that it might still grow.

Now this week,

instead of getting rid of the weeds within us or getting rid of the people in the world who are weeds ... Jesus is saying that God's Kingdom here on earth allows the weeds to grow in the hope that the wheat will thrive even in the midst of them, revealing all the more, the ways of God and the power of God's Kingdom.

How does all of that make you feel?

Well, I guess it depends on

the perspective from which you want to apply the parable to life ... applying it to me

personally, I glad for God's tolerance of the weeds in my life.

You see, our personal weeds

are often very entangled with so many other parts of our lives (even the good parts) ... that in totally eliminating the weeds it might take with it some of that which is good in us.

That part of me that teases

the dog ... is also the part of me that likes to have fun, can play, and be creative ... and I don't want to lose that.

From the perspective of

looking out into the world and identifying the "bad guys" out there ... I wish God was not

so tolerant ... I wish God would pull out the weeds as the servants suggested in the parable.

As much as we like the good & the bad

to be like the colors black & white, it's not that way in the world or in us ... those who are mean are still capable of compassion; and those who are compassionate can still be mean.

"Let both of them grow together, says the parable, until the harvest"

And you know what ... the harvest is God's business, not ours.

Our job is to cultivate the wheat

within us so that the weeds within us don't take over ... and our job is to be wheat in the

world so that the weeds out there can see the power of God active, alive, and giving life.

AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in God our Creator who brought light out of the darkness, who brought us forth from the dust of the earth, who every day brings us blessings for life and living.

We believe in Jesus Christ whom God sent to be the Light of the World. His life brought forth great light in what he taught, who he healed, and how he lived. His crucifixion and death was the world's attempt to extinguish that light. His resurrection assures us there is no darkness that can overcome the light of God. Jesus is our light and our hope!

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the energy of God, to bring the light of Jesus into our lives today. God's Holy Spirit calls us to move from darkness that entraps us to move into the light of Jesus. God's Spirit enlightens us with a spiritual wisdom and calls us to be the light of Christ bringing hope to the world through actions of love and service.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of wholeness and love ... we admit that we are a mixture of wheat and weeds, of goodness and impropriety, of integrity and indiscretion. We rely on your mercy that allows us to live our lives trying to cultivate in us that which is true. Help us to see more clearly the ways that evil can masquerade as good, the ways that good intentions can spring from selfish motivations, the ways a pleasant looking surface can hide a darkness within. We are wheat and weeds living in a world of wheat and weeds. We pray for your compassion and guidance to help us nurture the good in us and in the world so that the light of your kingdom can shine brightly in both our individual deeds and our collective actions. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of wholeness and love ... Cleanse from our own hearts the seeds of strife, greed, envy, and harsh misunderstandings that foster ill will, fear and desire for revenge. Make us quick to welcome ventures in cooperation among the peoples and nations of the world. Let there be woven into the fabric of our being a common good too strong to be torn by the evil hands of hatred and war. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of wholeness and love ... We pray for those in need all around the world. Where there is hunger, we pray for the provision of food. Where there is homeless, we pray for the provision of shelter. Where there is desperation to find a place to live free of fear and violence, we pray for the provision of peace. Use us and our congregation to be agents of provision bringing food, shelter, and peace into our community and the world.

God of wholeness and love ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of wholeness and love ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Let us pray:

*In the wonder of your abundance, O Lord, we are blessed with the gifts of life. Teach us generosity to give where there is need. Teach us compassion to give where there is hurt. Teach us love to give where there is emptiness. You are a God of abundance; teach us to live abundantly in service to you.
AMEN*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

You may say traditional Lord's Prayer or use the Aramaic translation printed below or you may say both in succession

*O Creator, the one who gave birth to the universe,
You are the sacred source of our being.*

*Focus Your ways, Your light, within us.
Make us useful for Your purposes here on earth so that
Your desire and our lives become one.*

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

*Loosen the cords of mistakes binding us,
as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.*

*Do not let surface things delude us, snare us, and lead us away
from You and Your purpose.*

*But free us from what holds us back, give us power to
live as you intended and created us to live.*

*From You comes the all-working will, the lively strength to act,
the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. AMEN*

BENEDICTION

*May God our Creator renew in us the creative Spirit
that brings healing and life to our world.*

*May Jesus our divine earthly companion,
uphold us in grace and love.*

*May the Holy Spirit our comforter and guide,
fill us with courage to be bearers of God's song of hope in the world. Amen.*

DISMISSAL

*We have gathered, we have given thanks and praise, we have worshipped.
Now we are called and sent to be the People of God in the world.
Empower us, Lord, with your Holy Spirit.
Called and sent, we go. Thanks be to God.*