

July 17, Pentecost 5A

Genesis 28:10-19a; Ps. 139:1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus is still teaching from the boat, still using agricultural metaphors but the stakes seem higher this time – now he is speaking about evil. He is not talking about infertile ground or lack of nurturing conditions; he is exposing those whose intention is to destroy someone else – to poison their livelihood, to ruin not just a crop but the soil itself and the farmer too. An enemy, he says, has done this. And not just an enemy of the person, but an enemy of God.

Scholars believe that they know what weed Jesus uses as an example – “the bearded darnel has no virtues; its roots surround the roots of good plants, stealing their water and nutrients while looking like wheat....its seeds cause everything from hallucinations to death. “ Jesus clearly acknowledges the presence of evil. It affects and infects individuals and communities; we, like those listening to Jesus, want it eradicated.

We have a history in the human community of making mistakes when we think we are rooting out evil – sometimes fear drives that bus. I think of the witch trials in Europe and the US. “When the crusaders slaughtered Muslims they claimed that Islam was a violent religion of the sword, a fantasy that had little basis in fact, “says Karen Armstrong. And during the Middle Ages the Christians held a belief that Jews mixed the blood of murdered children in the unleavened bread used at Passover. “ Leave it to God; Jesus cautions his listeners about a rush to judgment. We cannot always tell what is a good plant- or person - and what is not.

In a sermon on this text Martin Luther said wisdom is required. He said that Joseph and his brothers resembled each other but behaved very differently. His brothers were murderous but eventually the story changes. We all know about those who look like us, who look human, but are antagonists – at work, in positions of power, and at home. Jesus eventually tells the community how to deal with poisonous behaviours – by separating those who are intent on trouble.

All spiritual masters ask us to move beyond our desire to destroy the destroyers. This wisdom requires some reorientation on our part, a different way of seeing things which we hear about in our other lessons this morning; they reorient us to the long view, the God perspective. Jacob will move in new ways toward reconciliation with his brother even though he had a stone pillow. What he sees in a dream and senses in God’s voice will assure him that God is present with him and in that place; this will enable new behaviour on his part. Paul sees suffering as universal and undeserved but he chooses to see beyond the present and points to the kingdom of God where hope is the final word, hope in justice, hope in a new way of living.

We have to hope that the use of child soldiers will come to an end. Alex Guest and his students will help us see what is possible (visitors speak at this point about their project). Why would even a small action on our part might make a difference to the evil that is justified by a terrible name- the Lord’s Resistance Army. “All of life is interrelated, caught in an inescapable network,“ said Martin Luther King, Jr. “Whatever affects one affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I cannot be what I ought to be

unless and until you are what you ought to be. And vice versa, unless you are what you ought to be I cannot be what I ought to be.` That is the church`s challenge, to call us all and provide a place where everyone is what they ought to be.

Here is a poem composed by a young man put to death by Elizabeth I; his name is C. Tichbourne and on the eve of his execution he was not yet thirty years old. (1558-1586)

`My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,

My feast of joy but a dish of pain,

My cup of corn but a field of tares,

The day is past and yet I saw no sun.

And now I live and now my life is done...

My tale was heard and yet it was not told

My fruit is fallen and yet my leaves are green.

My youth is spent and yet I am not old..

I saw the world and yet I was not seen.

My thread is cut and yet it is not spun

And now I live and now my life is done.

This makes me think of our rush to judgment, our patterns of wrong doing. I wish the poem could be flipped into something more hope filled and maybe the gospel can....what if the kingdom of heaven is sown in a place of weeds. What if nonviolence is still a viable option? What if China stopped complaining every time the Dali Lama opened his mouth? What if every day we direct ourselves differently, away from anger, fear, resentment or enmity. The mind of love is very wide; the way of fear and hate is narrow. Love grows immeasurably and can embrace the whole world.

Remember that life is short and we have too little time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So be quick to be kind and make haste to love and the blessing of God will be with you.

Amen.+

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