



Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



Sunday 19 July 2020

READINGS

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

A Journey of Growth and Maturity

Last week we heard about the Parable of the Sower and the different types of soil in the Gospel of St Matthew. **Parables are a specific type of teaching tool of Jesus. The word parable literally means “to bring one thing alongside something else”. So, a parable brings one thing parallel with another so they can be compared.** In this case, Jesus explains the kingdom of God using parables, bringing something that seems beyond our understanding - God’s way of doing things - alongside something his listeners *did* understand very well: stories about agriculture, farming, everyday items and situations they had experience with.

In last week’s parable of the sower we heard that when God finds even the smallest patch of good soil in our hearts, God nurtures the Kingdom within us so that it produces an abundant harvest.

As mentioned in my letter last week, the parable of the sower described the various “state of affairs’ of the human heart and that we are called to live and relate to others and to God in our life’s journey. This life’s journey, a journey of growth and maturity with all its ambiguities, is sustained by a faithful God whose extravagant love is poured out on all of us without measure.

This week we see a further explanation of what the kingdom of God looks like in the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat. ***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.*** (Matthew 13:24-26)

Once again, the temptation here might be to look at this parable through the lens of contradictions – an either or: that things or people are either black or white, saints or sinners, good or bad (wheat and weeds) view of the world and of humanity. And this is because we are often uncomfortable with contradictions, especially about God.

These parables are about growth and maturity in our spiritual journey, whether that growth is on a personal, communal or global level. So, I wonder whether this parable of the wheat and the weeds isn’t inviting us to get a bit uncomfortable, to embrace contradictions about God and about ourselves?

I wonder if the parable doesn’t act like a jolt, a prompt for us to stop and examine the state of our inner lives. We know that no one is wholly a weed and no one is wholly wheat. Psychology teaches us that the human

person is far more complex than that – we are made up of various qualities and are shaped by various circumstances as we grow and mature into the adults that we become.

But we certainly have both weeds and wheat growing inside of us. We are, like the field in the parable, both mixed and messy. **Each of us individually, our faith communities corporately, and our world in its entirety, contain wheat and weed, good and evil.**

Perhaps today's Gospel is an invitation to take a frank look at our souls to see if some maintenance work is necessary. Perhaps it's also an invitation to look closely at our broader community and understand that it is not our responsibility to figure out and pull out weeds. Because in rushing to do so, our sincerity might evolve into arrogance. Our love might turn into judgment. Our sense of holiness into hypocrisy.

As one theologian and preacher, Debbie Thomas once said: **The fact is, the seeds of God's life in us are still young and growing. Our roots are delicate and tender, and they need time. They need lifetimes to grow. Jesus in this parable, also teaches us that we don't have the perspective of the sower, God.** We can't see everything clearly. And we don't need to. If we're wheat, we've got plenty to do trying to grow and mature.

Martin Luther famously said that we are at the same time saints as sinners (*simul justus et peccator*). He could have just as easily said, **"we are at the same time weeds as wheat."**

By looking soberly at our lives at the invitation of this Gospel, we might take the opportunity to see the ways in which we may have acted as citizens of the kingdom of God vs the ways we are acting like citizens of the kingdom the world. In other words, are the weeds taking over?

We live in a time when we have been given a sharp reminder about our unpreparedness at so many levels for a pandemic which is shaking the foundations of how we live and care for one another everywhere.

As these days of disruption to our "normal" continue, I think the stress and strain could make us vulnerable to behaving in ways that don't reflect the servant hearts that God seeks to find in us. We're stressed. We're anxious and afraid. We can get touchy and irritable. We start to snap at each other and at anyone who challenges our view of reality. We're quick to blame and judge. We get a little desperate. We're sad and unhappy and we start to find it easier to spread all those feelings than to wrestle through them.

(In this parable, Jesus also tackles the problem of sin in the world. Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk once spoke of the **"guilty bystander"** in all of us, whether in terms of our everyday decisions, where we expend our energies, support of our political ideals or our indifference to all the wrong things in our society. He maintained that none of us is innocent, though some of our "sins" or weeds may remain hidden.)

I think this parable points us to what kind of a church, or indeed a community that we ought to be – a church or community which is constantly and actively seeking transformation and growth, constantly seeking positive action, and constantly striving for holiness.

And we are called to do this with wisdom, with hope, with joy and with love. Furthermore, we are called to do this without believing that there is only one way being, one way of thinking and one way of acting. So that we are able to hold seemingly contradictory issues in a balance and know that that too, is the nature of God. all of us need the extravagant healing grace of God in order to begin to live new and transformed lives. Amen