

Pentecost 7 Matt 13 37 “Weeds or Wheat?” July 26 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen!

Today we probably need to start with a word about fairness. There is an odd streak within the human being that simply wants God to be fair. We want this whole life thing to be fair. We know what fair is. When we go to the grocery store, we buy the food, we pay the money, and walk out with the food. That’s fair. If we go home and discover that the dozen eggs only is actually eleven, we might cry “Unfair!”

But do we really want God to be fair? Job cried out for this in the book which bears his name. Habbakuk wondered why terrible things happened to the people of God. Thomas Aquinas asked if Evil was even a real thing. He said “no.” He said, Evil is like a shadow. The shadow is an absence of light. Evil is an absence of Good, an absence of God. Job has an answer, God is God, I am not.

Of course, we do not really want God to be fair. Fairness is not at all in our best interest. Job finds that out at the end of the book. If God is fair with me, I am in a serious amount of trouble, because “fair” means getting what I should get, what I deserve. I really want God to be gracious, which means that I must come to a number of situations which don’t seem fair to me and look at them differently.

In the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, and again the parable of the Prodigal Son/Forgiving Father, Jesus seems to be dealing the fairness problem that comes up when we consider God’s mercy and grace. “Why do they get the same thing I got when I worked a lot harder than they did?”

But there is another fairness issue which comes up with people. If God really does not like the sin in the world, if God has all this power, why doesn’t he do something about it? This question has been vexing the people of God for a long time. Many people who reject God’s witness today do so based on this complaint.

Jesus today, will address the question in one of the few instances within the NT that wrestles with this topic. He does so in the parable of the Weeds in the Wheat.

But just because Jesus addresses the issue, doesn't make it easy. Luther spoke of the Deus Absconditus or "Hidden God." This means that God has all the power, but doesn't reveal His power to us, rather we get His love revealed in the Cross and that is all we can really know of God right now.

To speculate about God's might, his wisdom, knowledge, and other attributes is looking for what we cannot know and may in fact distract us from the essential revelation He has made in Jesus. It is, in fact, a dead end. If we want to ask, "Why?" look to the cross, which is God's final answer to every broken heart in the world. He has entered into the sinful creation, endured its worst, and by uniting himself with all this world's suffering has somehow rendered it Holy.

I cannot explain the mechanics of this or the rationale. I am mystified by it too. But I also believe, without a doubt, that Jesus' death on the cross means He will dry every tear, even the tears that I am weeping in the face of my own personal tragedy.

Jesus, in His interpretation of the parable, gives a straightforward, point-by-point, completely obvious correspondence between the agricultural tale He has told and the details of His kingdom's contest with evil. The average reader is gratified to find a parable he finally understands. It's always nice when the teacher's explanations match the pupil's guesses at his meaning.

Biblical scholars, however, are often driven up the wall by it. Many of them, in fact, have felt that the explanation is inauthentic. They think it is just some gloss stuck into the text by some third rate mind whose goal was to beat people over the head with the obvious. Others, though, who still believe that Scripture actually is God's Word, nevertheless, attempt to excuse the parable as Jesus just having a bad day or having been early in His career and not yet adept at parabolizing.

I think a better explanation is that Jesus was giving the disciples what they could understand, until the mystery of His grace was revealed in His death and resurrection. It wouldn't be the first time that Jesus showed his frustration with the disciples' lack of understanding. Think of His words to Peter when He wanted to stop Jesus from entering Jerusalem (Matt. 16:23), "Get thee behind me Satan!"

Or the when the disciples could not heal the demoniac boy and the boy's father doggedly pursues Jesus and Jesus answers, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long do I have to put up with you (Matt. 17:17)? And then He heals the boy anyway. Or the miracle of the shekel in the fish's mouth. The tax collectors were pestering Jesus and Peter for the two-drachma temple tax, Jesus sends him to pull a shekel out of the mouth of the first fish he catches Matt. 17:27).

It gives you a peek into how Jesus felt as the teacher of such a brilliant collection of point missers. Even in their first framing of the question, they managed to turn the parable into something it was not. Jesus told it as a story of a kingdom that was like a man who sowed good seed in his field and then had weeds sown in it by his enemy. But they heard it as a story about weeds, period. They missed the good seed, the wheat. What He gave them was a deeply balanced analogy of the complex relationship between good and evil; but what they received was an out-of-whack fable about the problem of evil alone.

To give them credit, they did at least have a suspicion they hadn't quite understood his meaning; that's why they asked. But to give Jesus even more credit, He probably realized that if they didn't get his first comparison, they wouldn't get any subsequent ones either. Therefore, He simply said, "Yes, you don't understand," and told them only what they were prepared to hear. They, like we, are always more ready to see Law and how we can do it with Jesus help, than to accept that we are helpless apart from the substitutionary grace of Jesus Christ.

Now you might find to be sleight of hand. And quite possibly it is. But on the other hand, I don't feel guilty about offering it to you. Better minds than mine have done it before. St. Augustine said: the cross is a mousetrap for the devil; and then he *proceeded* to work out the whole scenario of the Crucifixion, complete with the devil salivating over the prospect of Christ's demise, and then being caught in the trap of the Redeemer's death, and finally realizing, in the Resurrection, that he had been tricked by fake bait. So enjoy. Or don't enjoy.

Jesus identifies each comparison in His allegorizing of the parable *of the Weeds*: the *sower* of the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the sons of the kingdom; the "bad seed," are the sons of the evil one; the enemy who sows them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world. In no more space than I have taken to write them down here, He skips blithely over the heart of his original parable: leaving the problem of the "evil one" to Him, and heads for the Judgment Day. What got a mere two-thirds of a verse in the first version is about to get fully half the total space in this one.

The angels, He says, are the harvesters. I am sorry, but I cannot resist imagining that Jesus is simply on a roll here. Who cares who the harvesters are? Their identity is completely irrelevant to his parable. But having set himself to "explain" everything to this bunch of dummies, He cannot resist laying it on thick. Indeed, I am a little surprised, given his flair for irony, he didn't lay it on even thicker, like this: the angels are the harvesters; the pitchforks they use to gather up the weeds are the seven cardinal virtues; the strings they use to bind them into bundles are the moral attributes of God; the wagon they use to cart them off is the chariot of the wrath of God; and the team that pulls the loathsome load is the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

I take back my apology. Putting it that way convinces me of something: Jesus didn't need biblical critics to tell him he shouldn't allegorize parables; he knew that. And when He did indulge in it, He did so with such a heavy hand that the results were almost as good as the famous spoof some critic made up for the parable of the Good Samaritan: the man who fell among thieves is the human race; the Samaritan is Christ; the oil and wine are the two Testaments; the inn is the holy catholic church; the innkeeper is the Pope; and the two pence are the two major sacraments: Baptism and Communion. And when the critic was told he had omitted the beast on which the Samaritan transported the wounded man, He replied, "Oh right, the donkey: the donkey is the fellow who made up this interpretation of the parable."

Enough of that. The rest of Jesus' allegories make the point all by themselves. "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire," he says, "so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin (*skandala*) and doers of lawlessness (*poiountas ten anomian*)."

Yes. That is indeed, in all seriousness, what God will do: it would be a pretty poor New Jerusalem if Jesus himself could not get all such menaces off its streets.¹

Jesus gives us rest – He carries the heaviest burdens for us. The Spirit of God lifts the burden of justice from our shoulders. We, through faith, receive Christ's righteousness and become wheat in Him. This is salvation by grace alone, through faith and not by works. God makes us to shine like the sun in the kingdom of heaven. We may still be mystified by the problem of evil. But we do know one thing, though, God loves his creation. So, despite our sinfulness, God through Jesus Christ redeems us. That is the message.

In difficult times we all **think** we want answers, but in truth, what we need is comfort. Knowing why something happens doesn't comfort us, but that Jesus weeps with us, promises His presence in our sorrow, and holds us in His arms; and promises us new life; that comforts us.

God's answer to the brokenness of the world is that He has entered it in Jesus, He has born its brokenness in the most profound way, a terrible injustice perpetrated on the world's only innocent man. And in subjecting himself to this world's suffering for us, He has offered the answer to this world's suffering: new life by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Herein He has and will dry every tear. Thank you Jesus!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!

¹ *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, Robert Ferrar Capon, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. 110-112