

King of Glory Lutheran Church

July 18/19, 2020

Year A: 7th Weekend after Pentecost: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Rev. Debra Abbott

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ 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?’ ²⁸ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ 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.’”

³⁶ 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.” ³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

My husband Brad and I do not have the same taste in movies or books. When I need a break from life I turn to anything written by Jane Austen. Give me a few words from her heroine Elizabeth Bennet in “Pride and Prejudice” any day and I feel better. Now my husband Brad does not enjoy Jane Austen but he loves a good James Bond movie or an adventure novel.

And yet, these stories that entertain each of us, relax us and comfort us have something in common.

Whether it is James Bond or Jane Austen the stories and movies we enjoy give us bad guys and good guys. Sometimes we can't tell right away who is who, but in the end we know. And it feels great when the good guys win and the bad guys lose.

Why is that? Why are we so entertained and relieved and comforted by stories that reveal good humans and bad humans?

Have you ever looked at someone and made a judgment as to whether they were good or bad? In a movie or in real life?

I know that I do this on a regular basis, sometimes without even thinking about it. I make quick judgments about who I trust and what I think about a person based on their appearance or their actions. I don't like to think of it as classifying people as good or bad but in reality, that is exactly what I do.

The person that threw some trash out of the car while driving past me. Bad. The person who gave up their seat on the bus for a senior citizen. Good. I could go on and on and I'm sure that you can think of many other examples as well.

When we stop and think about it, there are a whole lot of decisions we have to make every day and endless amounts of information coming at us. It can be exhausting. And sometimes it just saves time and energy to make quick judgments about other people.

Life seems easier and simpler when we can clearly identify the good and the bad. And sometimes it even feels good to make quick judgments about other people. We want the good guys to win and the bad guys to suffer. We want there to be order and happy endings in this world.

But real life isn't as simple as an action movie or a romance novel. In real life the good guys and the bad guys aren't obvious. People are complicated and rarely as clear cut as a good guy and a bad guy.

This week in our gospel reading Jesus tells a story about wheat and weeds, the good and the bad. This is another parable about a sower, like our gospel reading from last week, but this time there are two kinds of seeds and two sowers. The first sower sows good seeds during the day and at night an enemy comes and sows weeds among the wheat.

When all the plants come up the workers go to the sower and ask two questions. The first thing they say to the sower is “Where did these weeds come from?” How can there be weeds in the wheat? The sower tells them that an enemy has done this. And then they ask if they should try to pull out the weeds.

The sower responds, “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.”

The workers want to pull out the weeds not realizing that in doing so they might pull out the wheat as well. The weeds and wheat look alike and their roots have grown together. Telling the wheat and weeds apart and then separating them while they are growing is almost impossible. I suspect that some gardeners and farmers know this problem well.

This is a parable, a story, about a farmer but Jesus tells it in order to teach us something about our own lives and God’s ways.

The workers want to pull out those weeds and get rid of what doesn’t belong with the wheat, what won’t provide a good harvest. It’s their first instinct.

But the sower says no, let them grow together. It is not for you to separate the weeds from the wheat. You may not be able to tell what are weeds and what is wheat.

As we think about the weeds and the wheat today I think Jesus is putting before us an intriguing, even convicting question. Do we really think we can tell who the weeds are among the wheat? Do we know who is good and who is bad? Do we know who is in and who is out in God’s kingdom?

If there is one thing we know as Christians, we know that our God is full of surprises. And just when we think we are able to judge who is good and bad, God asks us to think again, look again, listen again.

Jesus teaches over and over again that the people who look bad or evil or sinful are the people he wants to hang out with and are the people he has come to save. And those people who appear to be good, respected and admired may not necessarily be what they seem or understand God’s love.

Good and evil are not always as straight forward or as clear, as we might hope or think.

Every day we try in so many ways to label people and decide who is clearly good and clearly bad. We break people down into categories of good and evil all the time - in government, in business, in school, in the church, in our own families and friends. We judge people by the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the language they speak. We judge one another by age, gender, and skin color.

I don't think we will ever stop judging or comparing or trying to understand each other. But today Jesus reminds us that we all live together, and it is not for us to judge or cut down one another.

As tempting as it may be to label other people as good or bad, if we are honest we do it to ourselves as well. Have you ever asked yourself, am I a good person? Have you ever not liked the answer?

Martin Luther said we are simultaneously saint and sinner. We are not saints because of our good behavior but because by God's grace we have been forgiven. And yet we struggle with sin, with all that separates us from God, with our own brokenness.

The good news for us today is that bad or good, Jesus knows you and loves you and forgives you. Hear this good news today that we do not need to judge ourselves or others. Those judgments pull apart and divide people and communities when in fact we are called as Christians to forgive, serve and love.

We are called to grow together and support one another as we go about being the people God has created us to be.

It's hard to do, living with the good and the bad in life. But part of our life as God's children is to live with that tension knowing and trusting that God will sort out the good and the bad. In God's kingdom it is God's mercy and judgment that reigns.

Let's practice God's mercy, grace and forgiveness this week and leave the judgment to God.

Amen.