

This week we heard Jesus tell the parable of the seeds in which he compares the kingdom of heaven to good wheat seed sowed in a field but in that same field an enemy sneaks in and sows bad seeds...weeds. When the plants grow together they are hard to separate without damaging the wheat. Therefore the householder instructs his slaves to let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest.

Parables are notoriously tricky vignettes. They can be metaphors, in which a figure of speech is used to symbolize something it is not, or they can be allegories in which each figure or critical element represents something else. Some of Jesus' parables are hard to understand because they allude to life in 1st century Palestine in ways that are not familiar to us. Moreover parables can have multiple meanings and sometimes the obvious meaning obscures the deeper meanings but in today's gospel we are lucky that Matthew depicts Jesus explaining the parable to his disciples. We get the meaning from the horse's mouth, as it were!

Jesus says that he is the sower; the good seeds are those who hear his words, the "children of the weeds" are the children of the evil one. Sorting the two out will come on judgment day when the weeds will be collected and burned and there will be gnashing of teeth. On the one hand it's a satisfactory image, we can trust that God is going to punish all the evil-doers who seemed to have gotten away with it during their lifetimes, on the other hand, we see how evil-doers get to live out their lives, sometimes more pleasantly than those who were good and that can make many of us anxious and angry and judgmental. But the promise that the righteous will shine like the sun is a bright one and something to which we hope that we can look forward.

Notice how we most of us tend to identify with the good seeds!

But perhaps, perhaps we can tweak this parable just a little when we consider our reading from Genesis.

Today's reading continues the saga of Jacob, that second born son of Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob has duped his elder brother out of his birthright and the blessing that should have been bestowed upon him by tricking his elderly and blind father. Esau, portrayed as a rough man, prone to violence, is rightfully angry with Jacob and has threatened to kill him and now Jacob is on the run.

When Rebecca had been pregnant with the twins the Lord had told her that the twins would be divided and that they would struggle with each other but that ultimately the elder would serve the younger. (25:23) Isn't it telling that God would bypass the traditional rule of primogeniture in favor of the younger son? God's ways are not our ways. Not only is Jacob the younger son he is a bit of a trickster. How ethical is it to deceive your elderly and blind father by pretending to be your older brother? But God chooses whom God chooses and God uses whom

God uses. God will use Jacob to further God's plan for Israel and for the salvation of us all. So to reframe our parable, the field of good seed is the human heart where God's intention for us at creation was that we would be like shimmering fields of wheat, part of the glory of creation. And as we heard Paul lament just two weeks ago "...I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin, I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rom 8:14-b-15) Somehow the evil one seems to plant the weeds in all of us and we find ourselves behaving in ways that are not what we would have hoped of in ways that we think are to be benefit but in reality are warping our perception of the impact of our behavior. This is most apparent when we blind ourselves to the ways of injustice in the world. We become too comfortable with the status quo and reject that which challenges our comfort and we mistake the values of our society for those of God. Unfortunately weeds are weeds whether we are aware of them or not. Sin is in us, and we do not have the power to root it out ourselves. And God is merciful for God does not strike us down in an effort to rid us of our sins – I suspect that would destroy us, or at the very least disrupt the free will with which Jesus hopes we will choose to follow him. This is not to say that Jacob does not suffer the consequences of his behavior, or rather that God puts him through his paces as he fulfills his destiny.

Jacob, as we will read in the coming weeks, will escape to his uncle's household where he will be tricked into providing 14 years of labor for his wives. He will eventually have to flee his uncle's household, face a reckoning with his brother, lose his beloved wife Rachel in childbirth, hear that his daughter has been raped, lose his son Joseph to the shenanigans of Joseph's brothers, be tortured when Joseph demands the visit from Benjamin, and be uprooted during a time of famine to the land of Egypt. So yes, Jacob learns of the vicissitudes of life the hard way - as do all of us – although for us they may not be quite as dramatic.

Nevertheless it is important not to lose sight of what has happened in today's reading. Jacob goes to sleep and has the most incredible dream in which he sees angels going up and down a ladder to heaven. Then the Lord God stands beside him and introduces himself, reiterating the promise that God had originally made to Abraham, saying "I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you." (Gen 28:15b) Jacob has been chosen and Jacob has been blessed. In the end Jacob will fight with a divine being, be wounded in his thigh, and renamed Israel. Jacob has been chosen to do God's work. Jacob has been gifted with God's promise Jacob has a relationship with God that will not be broken.

When he awakens from sleep Jacob realizes that he has had transformative experience and acknowledges it by setting up a pillar and consecrating it, making it sacred with oil. He names the place Beth-el which in Hebrew means House of God, and in the following verses pledges to give back to God 1/10th of all that he has received.

Now most of us are not grabbed by God for God' s purpose in such a radical way but we are all called to God in our own way and that way usually includes suffering. Yet we can find comfort in Paul's word "we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:16-17) The reflection you see in the mirror in the morning may not tell you so but Christ calls to his own and in baptism we have indeed we have become his own. Because of Jesus Christ it is no longer just one person singled out by God but all of us who, in the waters of baptism, have been buried with Christ in his death and reborn by the Holy Spirit.

As human as we are sinful creatures, with more than a touch of the glory that can give us the strength to say the prayer of our collect and to be very glad that God will reserve judgment till Christ comes again.

"Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Amen.