

“Again I Say, ‘Listen!’”

7th Sunday after Pentecost – July 19, 2020 – Matthew 13:24-20; 36-43/A

Jesus put before them another parable: “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. 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?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’

The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘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.’”

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

GRACE and PEACE to you from God, the Creator, and from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last Sunday Pastor Anteneh preached a wonderful sermon on the well-known parable of the Sower and the Seed. While you probably remember his labels for the types of soil, “thorny, pathy, and rocky” there was one word that he especially hoped you would remember. Since we all seem to be a little affected by what is being called “Covid brain” – a lack of focus or a diminishing capacity to recall – I won’t ask you to shout out the word he asked us to remember. And because Grace Abounds, I’ll just tell you. The word was ***Listen!*** It came at the beginning of Jesus’ teaching of these two planting parables, and it concludes them by reiterating, ***Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!***

Jesus seems to tell people to ***Listen*** quite a bit. You’d think he’d be firing us up to *Go! Tell! Share! Act! DO something!* But no. The Savior of the World has a very different agenda and it is deeply rooted in the word, “Listen.” Why? Because LISTENING is the foundation of relationship. ***Listening*** takes us out of ourselves and places us into the lives of the ones to whom we listen. Once we can say we have “heard” their stories, we will begin to live as community, not simply as “what’s in it for me?” individuals. ***Listening*** draws us into the Body of Christ – whether we can connect physically – or only virtually for a time. “Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.” ***Listening*** to Jesus, and ***listening*** to each other is the one true thing that shares God’s love and strengthens and lifts up our relationships.

So, what is it that we are supposed to be listening **for** in these two agricultural parables? Are we to glean some good Biblical advice for sowing or planting seed? Is this a primer for a better way to calculate the harvest? What shall we take away, if we really listen to what Jesus is teaching? What piece of his heart is he sharing to this crowd, which, btw, was probably more than half tenant farmers and farm workers. These folks knew about fields and how to eke out the very best harvest in whatever conditions were available.

It’s probably a good thing Jesus was a carpenter, because he really didn’t know much about farming. Any of you who have ever planted a garden or a field know that allowing weeds to

grow up with whatever you planted is not a good idea. The weeds “choke” the wheat, and they leave multitudes of seeds for the next year and the next and the next! So why would Jesus tell stories that his hearers knew more about than he did? Maybe it was so they would LISTEN! (Jesus knew how to hook a crowd into a great conversation for sure – just talk about what *they* know. Make connections with *their lives*. Share God’s love to the likes of even the least of these).

No, these stories are not really about farming, or economics, or even a “how to” for weeds to become wheat or advice on how wheat can stay away from weeds. Parables, you might recall, are **always** about God, **not us**, and seeking to find your role in this parable is really fruitless, because in this story there is **no advice or actions for you to model**. It has **nothing to say** about being (or becoming) wheat in a sea of weeds, nor does it outline steps for a successful garden. It is about something much greater: a successful Creation, a successful community, the K.O.G.

Today’s reading began, *The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field...like a man who seeds the garden he created on his own land...and those seeds were the children of God, whose righteousness will shine like the sun at the harvest...* Pretty nice image, eh? So it’s rather disturbing that, just when everyone is resting from a good day’s work, into this amazing Creation of the Heavenly Farmer sneaks a Sower of Weeds, intending to disrupt the growth of this Field of Dreams.

I knew a Garden Artist some years ago who used to say, **“A weed is anything that grows where you don’t want it.”** I’m not sure that is true in this story, but I do know that the workers were most concerned about the harvest, and those weeds were sure to disrupt the growing wheat...but the owner is also watching the growing, not just for the harvest, but for the workers’ response to the Master’s Plan - **especially** when it runs counter to the workers’ own plans. They are looking for a cash crop, forgetting that wheat will be wheat, and weeds, weeds. Something the owner is very well aware of.

For the time will come - when the Owner/God tells his reapers to cut it all. This is the part that is hard for us to hear: **first, weeds** are collected and bound to be burned – and what good comes from burning bundles of weeds? Well, fuel for cooking, to warm those in a dwelling or to use as light in the field. **After that, the wheat** is gathered into the barn – and what happens there? It gets THRESHED! Beaten, broken up, chaff sifted and blown away; grain ground into tiny stuff to be measured and mixed, kneaded and baked. And finally, bread, to feed a hungry world...

Are you listening, Church? We were **never called to rid the world of evil**. Jesus says the Enemy has come and gone - weeds have been sown with the wheat, and God says, *Let them grow up together*. If **we** try to root out evil, we’ll do damage – because dividing weed and wheat is simply **not our** job. For we would use our own yardstick of production and value and worth. We would calculate good and evil based on our preferences. Once again, Original Sin would be play out in our prideful natures, because we think we know better than God what is good for us and for everyone else. We didn’t **listen**.

“Not mine to decide.” Those are the words of awareness that we will need, to really hear the story Jesus is telling us this morning, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field.”* The field has already been sown, the growing season is underway, already in process, and it is clear that no one knows about the weeds until the grain appears.

But the farmer is content to let it all go on for awhile, content to “suffer it” for now. That’s the old-fashioned word used to translate the Greek word *“Aphete”* (which means to let, to permit, to suffer. And finally, to **forgive**. It’s all part of the process of creating). The owner of the field is just fine watching it grow naturally for awhile. As the Hebrew language describes much more clearly, he’s happy to watch the wheat “wheating” and the weeds “weeding,” just doing what they

were made to do. Just like human beings being human: making choices – some good, some not so good. Just like God being God: continually and faithfully sowing good seed – flinging it generously everywhere - on paths and rocks, into weeds and on to good soil...

So, listen: the wheat will be wheat, the weeds, weeds, and the human beings will be well, **human**. The seeds sown just become what they always were. So where is the Good News in that? Where is God's love in the midst of a world filled with good and evil? If you have ears to hear, you will have already heard it as you listened: "*Let both of them grow together until the harvest; (it is not yours to decide)*". But when it is time, the Master will tell the angelic reapers to cut it down.

And then, God will USE it. God will USE it all. Amen.

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