

Pentecost 5, Proper 11A, 071711
All Saints Episcopal Church

The slaves said to Jesus, '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;

At first glance, the meaning of today's Gospel lesson seems perfectly straightforward - much like last week's Gospel about the sower who sowed seed in different kinds of soil - only from the other side of the coin. Instead of a sower casting seed on good soil, rocky soil and the soil of a foot path, this story is about a good sower who sows good seed in his field, but then is followed by a bad sower who sows bad seed in the same field. The good seed is wheat; the bad seed is a specific plant called darnel, a weed.

According to Bible dictionaries and plant dictionaries, darnel is a grass that grows in the same climate as wheat and also looks very much like wheat when it is immature. The roots of the darnel intertwine with the roots of the wheat. The grains of the darnel are very loosely attached to the stem - and they are very toxic. So the dilemma for the field's owner is: do I pull up the shoots of the darnel and pull the wheat out, too, or do I wait until the harvest and poison the grain as well as contaminate next year's crop with the falling seeds? It is not an easy choice.

The traditional explanation for the components of this parable are: wheat = good people, weeds = bad people, good sower = Son of Man, bad sower = devil, harvest = end of the age, reapers = angels. At the end of the age, angels separate the bad people from the good and the bad ones are burned up in the fiery furnace. The good people go to heaven.

However...

This explanation does not seem realistic to me at all. After all, are there really people who are all good, or all bad? It seems pretty clear that I am a good person. What about y'all? Aren't you good people, too? And don't we know bad people when we see them or hear about them? Murderers, rapists, child abusers - of course. Or, maybe. But what about when we get into gray areas such as Bernie Madoff types, who steal people's money, or Rupert Murdoch corporations (you know,

corporations are people, too, now) who apparently lie and cheat to get "the news?" Are they all bad or somewhere in the middle?

And who gets to decide on this, anyway?

If we are the "good" people - which, of course, we are - are we the ones who get to judge who the "bad" people are? No. Because the thing is, we are all both good and bad. None of us is totally one way or the other.

If we stick to the traditional good guy/bad guy interpretation of this parable, there aren't many possibilities of conversion or reconciliation or compassion or maturing in faith or any of the other things we know are important. But if, as in last week's parable, we consider the idea that all things are interconnected - that WE are interconnected with each other, with our neighbor, with the whole of the created order - then we are, all of us, both wheat and weeds, both good and bad, our roots intertwined inseparably from one another.

Martin Luther King said, "All I'm saying is simply this, that all life is interrelated, that somehow we're caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality."

Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Interconnectedness.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

If you give even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, you have done it to me.

Feed the hungry. Heal the sick. Visit the lonely.

How much simpler can it get? Love each other. Do justice. Respect the dignity of others. Help others to be who they are called to be so that you can be who you are called to be. The interrelated structure of reality.

There's a prayer attributed to St. Francis, which you can find in our Book of Common Prayer. It speaks about the sort of sower we are called to be in this life of connection to one another:

Lord make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred,
Let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, Joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.