

Grace Episcopal Church
Proper 11 – 8th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev Brian C Justice

Isaiah 44.6-8
Psalm 86.11-17
Romans 8.12-25
Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43

The Weeds and The Wheat

In the 13th chapter of Matthew, Jesus continues to teach with the image of a sower sowing seeds into a field. In today's parable there is a new element: the enemy who sows weeds among the wheat. When the slaves of the house discover this, they ask the Master if they should gather the weeds. The Master says, no, let the wheat and the weeds grow together. They will be sorted out in the end.

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This is a very deep parable. This is a very challenging parable. It is so counter-intuitive – so *compassionately* counter-intuitive – that it makes us uncomfortable. After all, it goes against our instincts. It goes against everything we have been taught by culture and by religion.

If you are growing wheat, then pull the weeds!

But no, says the Master, let them grow together for now. They will be sorted out in the end.

I think that is what is so deep and so challenging in this teaching of Jesus.

They will be sorted out in the end.

This parable is about many things, but it is about non-judgment.

Judgment belongs to God, not to you and me.

(To that, I say, thank God! I don't want the job. Even if my last name is justice.)

But we are so quick to judge anyway.

That is the natural tendency we have as human beings. And religion and culture only make it worse.

Religion often makes people so self-righteous and so ready to judge others with a judgment that they would never apply to themselves. That's why religious people are often so repellant. I don't even like religious people. Which is an occupational hazard in my line of work.

Culture intoxicates us – literally! – even more with the impulse to judge. Our political culture where partisan allegiance mixes with social media makes for a lethal combination. Twitter and Facebook, with their algorithmic manipulation and their posts and re-posts and likes and don't likes and shares and don't shares, have become toxic judgment-filled echo chambers where people *instantly* pass judgment on *everything and everyone*. In a minute of doomscrolling, you can very effectively sentence the other half of the country to eternal damnation and hellfire. And you have to admit, that's efficient.

But after all, if you are growing wheat, then pull the weeds!

But no, says the Master, let them grow together for now.
They will be sorted out in the end.

Judgment belongs to God, not to us.
This is not only hard, this is tricky.
This teaching is sophisticated and subtle.

Because this is not to say we just let everything go. This is not to say we don't call violence, violence; or racism, racism; that we don't call a lie, a lie; a theft, a theft.

We do!
We must speak the truth, as best as we are able.
And we must work to repair the wrongs done to one another, as best as we are able.

But we must leave final judgment of a person's final worth up to God.

If we are honest with ourselves, in the fields of our own hearts, we all have some wheat and some weeds growing there. And if we do, everybody else does, too.

Our calling is to work the plants of the fields with as much commitment and as much courage and as much compassion as we can.
And let the only one who is capable of it sort them out in the end.

Amen.