

That Mysterious Night Walker

J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
Third Sunday after Pentecost, A.D. 2011, July 3

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 24 [Jesus] 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!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Our Lord Jesus told stories, good stories, true stories. We call them parables, of course. His parable today seems to be a bit of a downer. Why would He tell such a story about "that mysterious night walker?"

Here's a thought -- He also tells right here the parable of the mustard seed. Meaning?

My impression: that the Church will get bigger and bigger, and be victorious over all enemies, and be filled with power, success and glory.

Maybe to offset such a "success image" Jesus told this parable of the tares among the wheat. It speaks to the utopian in each of us; you know, those who think the world ought to be perfectible, and that good will always triumph over evil.

Shouldn't every evil -- say, terrorists -- be overcome and smashed? Preferably right here in front of us?

This parable also speaks to us who begin to despair about the Church: will it endure? will it last? Or will evil win out? In this present age, where we live between the eons, how are we going to hold in tension the ambiguities, the twofold realities, of good and evil?

Part 1. What Is The Nature of Evil?

We all have our own ideas of what evil is like, where it comes from, and what to do about it. Where we might agree is that evil in our world is mysterious and sinister, that it loves darkness, and that it is a power at work everywhere.

Jesus said, "**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.**

An enemy, indeed, is set loose among us. Here's an example of this weediness:

A Sunday comic strip about big business, shows Dilbert in a meeting with the IT (internet technician) guy speaking. "We're discontinuing technical support for all our products." Next frame, Dilbert looks at the IT guy as he continues, "A recorded message will explain it to the caller this way" ... Next, IT guy: (quote) "In order to serve our customers better, we've discontinued technical support." Next, Dilbert asks, "How does that serve customers better?" IT guy: "We'll redirect those resources to other areas." Dilbert, "What other areas?" Next frame, IT guy: "PROFITS." Next, IT guy, "That makes your bonus larger. Any other questions?" Last frame, Dilbert: "Apparently I'm engulfed in evil." IT guy (with a fist pump) : "That's the spirit!"

"Engulfed in evil." Have you ever felt that way? If you follow the news in the papers or on radio & TV, you surely have.

The trial of a single mother whose dead child was found in a swamp near her house with duct tape apparently over the mouth & nose was broadcast far and wide.

Recently an eight year old boy in an orthodox Jewish community was smothered and dismembered by an adult of that Orthodox community.

Stories of kidnappings of children are repeated again and again as the years pass.

So there's this from a recent article:

"...the leading cause of all social pathologies is single motherhood.... Various studies have shown that children raised by a single mother comprise about 70 percent of juvenile murderers, delinquents, teenaged mothers, drug abusers, dropouts, suicides and runaways. Imagine an America with 70 percent fewer of these social disorders...." *[Ann Coulter, Syndicated Columnist]*

And these signs of what is now called "a moral crisis" in America -- could the government's banning of the Ten Commandments from public places and the banning of prayer in school and the attempts to take "under God" out of the Pledge of Allegiance --- could those have had anything to do with the so-called "sexual revolution" and the rise of "feminism" which in turn "empowered" people to "do their own thing? Anything at all? ? Possibly? ? ?

But not only in the corporate towers, nor in the corrupt halls of government, nor on the every day streets and farms of where we live, do we see signs of evil, but also in the assemblies of bishops and synods.

Helmut Thielicke, in his book, "The Waiting Father," says of this parable,

"...this same mysterious twilight hangs over the Church of Christ, and ... here, too, another figure, spectral and shadowy, a demonic double, follows the Divine Sower, scattering seeds of negation and destruction." [1959, p. 73] In the church?

Even as we meet this morning where the Word of God is being sown, that sinister power is sowing toxic seed among the furrows of our hearts.

We have only to open our eyes to see the ambiguities around us, the uncertainties and double meanings.

There is no garden or lawn where weeds are not found.

In the realm of technology where the command of our Creator to "subdue the earth" (Gen. 1) has led, among other inventions, to atomic power, we still have not found sufficient intelligence to know where to safely store the radioactive waste.

Like Goethe's "Sorcerer's Apprentice" we have set loose the mops and buckets that march, march, march, -- march, march, march, and we don't know how to stop them.

In our homes and families how many a mother and father reared their child faithfully, surrounded him with a good clean atmosphere, and prayed with him at his bedside at night.

Yet despite all this, something strange begins to grow, and another influence comes beaming in from a different place, and they can do nothing about it.

Part 2. Is There Help in the Power of Good?

Our text reads, v.27b, **"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.'**

Why does our Lord stifle the holy zeal of the slaves who want to rip out the weeds?

For three reasons:

First, Please realize that you cannot exterminate evil by your own personal exertions. After all, the evil is within you.

This is the tragedy of all social reformers and moralists -- the devil is around their necks.

Do we want to be rid of the bars and chains of evil? The problem is that we can't even seriously want to.

Jesus would say: 'I would not have had to die for the redemption of all if an appeal to morality were all that were necessary.'

As good as you may be, you can't exterminate evil by yourself. No utopia -- no heaven on earth.

Secondly, our Lord does not force an intervention. He said, **"No; ... 30 Let both of them grow together until the harvest;"**

One theologian wrote, "We are here confronted with the mystery of the patience of God." [Suzanne De Dietrich, Saint Matthew, SCM Press, 1961, p. 83]

Here is how good our Savior is. Let them have time to repent. Give them access to the Seed of the Word, and who knows but what even the hardest soil may one day be softened to receive the message of good news.

Remember when the disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven to rain on the Samaritans who would not accept Jesus?

For the same reason He wouldn't let them -- give them time to repent and believe the gospel.

"Let both ... grow together ..." is a sign of the grace of God. For it is by grace you have been saved, St. Paul reminds us. (Eph. 2) It is a gift of God.

Third, the Householder points out that the slaves are not able to properly separate the tares/weeds from the wheat.

He said, "**for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.**"

Now here is a contradiction, a paradox. On the one hand the Householder and the slaves both could see the weeds -- they could distinguish them even though the original Greek word for weeds/tares means plants that, from a distance, look just like wheat.

And yet the slaves are told not to uproot weeds because they couldn't tell them from wheat.

We have heard that there are hypocrites among the company of church-goers.

Does this mean that you and I cannot judge the good characters from the bad? Or that we are not permitted to judge.?

Indeed we are told, "Judge not lest you be judged."

Here, too, is a paradox. If we compare, say, the writings of Blessed Martin Luther with the writings of the nihilistic and atheistic philosopher Nietzsche, can we not say the first author is good and the other evil?

But is there anyone who is all good or all evil? Was not Blessed Martin also a sinner? Is anyone wrong totally? merely a blasphemer? or a hedonistic pleasure-seeker?

Is not each also a misguided child of our Creator God?

So, first, we're not stronger than evil; secondly, be patient with evil doers; and third, we are not smart enough to separate the tares from the wheat.

Have we never met a person, however depraved, unbelieving and vicious, even a liar of a quarreling neighbor, or a scheming, slippery fellow worker, and about them we dared to say, "This person is a weed and nothing but a weed."

Do we not see that our Lord Jesus died also for her?

None of us know what God has in store for those persons nor for any of us.

When we judge, if it is our place to judge, we are always to judge according to the rule of love.

St. Paul said it this way in 1 Cor. 13:

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.

And in those words we have a perfect picture of our Savior, who died for us while we were yet sinners, and who loves us with an everlasting love.

"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; ..."

Conclusion. Still the season of grace runs its course, and in it not only that mysterious and sinister nightwalker, but also the Divine Sower are scattering their seeds.

Let us pray to our Lord Jesus that He will "...gather a harvest from the [good] seeds that were sown, that we may be fed with the Bread of Life."

43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g.

-- The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain, Snowline Hospice, Diamond Springs, CA.