

July 21 2002 Proper 11

(Open with wilting corn plant)

This has been a week of groaning for me. It has been hot, **very** hot. And it has been dry, **very** dry. Until this week, I have been holding out hope for those poor plants groaning in the sun. Hope that a rain would come and still provide me with a good return on my investments. But this has been the week when my outlook has changed. As I look out at the scorched and wilted plants each day, I am less and less hopeful. In other places, the heat and drought has taken a toll as well. It must be miserable working at Reinke's or the elevator or just about any place without air conditioning in this weather. And if you have air-conditioning, the cost of keeping cool strains you as well. The city of Lincoln is enacting mandatory water rationing for the first time in the city's history. Farther away, hundreds of thousands of acres of forest are being burned by wildfires. In other places, floods wreak so much havoc that people pray for the rain to stop! Yet, in the other side of the world, drought and famine are so bad that people are literally eating dirt just to try and fill their stomachs. It was on 20-20. I saw a person eating dirt. And on top of everything else, I had to go to the emergency room because of some unbearable pain. I found out I have kidney stones! Things are falling apart in a hurry. **I'm thinking about switching from an optimist to a pessimist, but I'm sure that wouldn't help anything either!** This is a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad world. (I had read *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very Bad Day* to the kids for the Children's Sermon.)

We live in a world that is falling apart. A world that is groaning, subjected to futility and decay. There is no doubt or argument about that. Yet, we gather here this morning as a group of people who have a **hope**. A group, a community, that lays claim to a belief that there is a different reality than the one we experience in the everyday, physical world we live in. In that new reality, we confess a faith that makes us into new creations. That faith can change a person into something completely different from who they were before. God has intended this change from the foundation of the world and it has spread over the entire planet. (BIG SIGH)

Why is it still such a mess???

Perhaps Jesus gives us an answer or at least some peace about this question in the parable he told the crowds. In old language it is called the Parable of the *Wheat and the Tares*, in our translation it is the *Wheat and the Weeds* but in reality it should be the *Wheat and the Cheat*. (show the cheatgrass bundle)

This is the weed commonly known as cheat. It comes up in the fall, over winters as a small grass, and then quickly sprouts this little seed head and dies. If you don't recognize the plant, I'm sure you will recognize the seed. It is the stuff you have to pick out of your socks when you walk through weedy areas. They poke you and stick to your socks like Velcro. **Understanding this weed, cheat, helps us to understand the words of Jesus.** This parable communicates to us the nature of the kingdom Jesus came to establish. To begin to understand it, we need to look at it carefully at the words he used, what they meant to his audience, and how they speak to us today.

Someone sowed a field with good seed. **Good seed.** That means each and every seed is capable of producing a plant that will yield grain. Today we rate seed using the term, *Pure Live Seed*. The seed, the **potential**, that God sows is pure. There are no weeds. And it is alive. It will grow and reproduce. In this short sentence, Jesus reasserts that **God is all good**. He intends no evil for anyone. God does not plant weeds. He may allow them to grow for the time being, but they do not come from him.

So the field is planted and when the crop heads out, the servants notice that some of the plants are not wheat. Notice that it is not until the plants started to produce grain that the weeds are recognized. Jesus didn't tell the story using any old weed however. He specifically picked a weed that looks a lot like wheat. It has the same life cycle, looks very similar while growing and has a very fibrous, intertwining root system. It is not until the two plants start to produce a seed that they can be identified. Wheat produces grain that is useful and can nourish our bodies. Cheat produces nothing but sharp, poky, little bits of irritation that just produce more cheat. For me, this adds a whole new approach to this parable. **It**

shifts the meaning away from the fact that weeds are there and they were planted by the devil, to the servants who want to rid the field of them.

If you are a farmer who has grown wheat you know that what the servants propose, to go into the fields and pull out the cheat in a field of wheat, is a nearly impossible task. The fact that the servant ask to do this shows they don't know much about farming. They don't realize the consequences of their action. They were probably good, well intentioned people who were just trying to do what they thought was best.

We know there is evil in the world. It causes great pain and suffering and even death. All of us here have experienced it. **We want to be rid of it.** We don't understand why it has to be this way. To us it seems so simple. Just get rid of it. Pass a law. Start a petition. Invest in more education, or rehabilitation, speak softly, carry a big stick, use the stick if necessary. There must be something we can do to make things better. Surely life would be better if no one ever had an abortion, if human sexuality wasn't so complicated, if no one ever got sick, if no one ever had an addiction, if no one ever died?

In this parable, Jesus tells us **we can't answer those questions.** We don't have the ability to see things from the perspective of the Master farmer. In trying to rid ourselves, or more often trying to rid someone else, of some evil weed in their life, we may actually end up causing more harm. So what are we to do? Nothing? Does God expect us to just put up with all of the nasty, poky, irritating, weeds in this life? "Yes and No", says God.

In one sense we are to do nothing about the weeds because we are unable. We cannot rid the world of evil or evil-doers. **That is God's job.** God will harvest both and put them in their places. In verse 30 of Matthew 13, the word 'let' is translated from the greek word "**aphete**". It is also translated as permit or suffer. Both the wheat and the weeds are permitted to grow together, to suffer together until harvest. The really cool part about all of this greek stuff is seeing how the words are related, because the major word for forgiveness in the NT is "**aphesis**" which then translates as a 'letting be' a suffering, and a

permission all in one word. In response to evil intentions of the enemy, the farmer in the parable lets or permits a suffering because he knows that is what is best.

Here now is the part where we can do something. In response to the pain, the evil, the cruelty, the everyday junk that happens in our real world, **we should reach out with forgiveness**, a letting go, not by attacking or abolishing the things or persons we see as problems. Paul says that we have a hope. In hope we were saved. It is a hope we cannot see. That hope is the restoration of all things. God will do something about evil. He will rid us of it once and for all and as his adopted children, we will share in that new existence but first we must suffer through living with the weeds of this world. Consider this cheat again. It is what is called an “opportunistic weed” which means it only grows if it is given an opportunity. You will never find a permanent field of just cheat (Well maybe on some farms) because almost everything else can out-compete it, if there is good growth. Yes cheat and other weeds can and do grow on good soil, but they are never permanent vegetation. What are we to do about evil? The answer lies not in **uprooting** it but in **out-growing it**.

God gives us the elements we need for good growth. Faith, Hope, Love, forgiveness and a glimpse at a deathless existence. That is God’s reality. **Nothing ever dies to God, no one is ever unloved, everything has a chance at new start**. That is the new creation we can live right now in Jesus. That is why this church thing matters. It is the only solution. We may still groan, but we know, we have hope, that there is a bigger picture. [There is in fact a God who loves us and who is in control of all things](#). We share that hope with each other every time we worship in his name. Here the words again. The ancient words of Isaiah:

Do not fear, or be afraid;

have I not told you from of old and declared it?

You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?

There is no other rock; I know not one.

Praise and glory be to God who loves and saves us. Amen.