



NEOS Summer Sabbath Sermon Series
July 23, 2023
Lectioary 16, Year A
Bishop Laura Barbins

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus tells a parable about the coexistence of good and evil in this world. God's judgment will remove all evildoers and causes of sin, but not until the end of human history.

²⁴[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?’ ²⁸He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.’”

³⁶Then 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.” ³⁷He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

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

Sermon Text

Did you ever do a “trust fall”?

The idea was that with arms crossed in confidence, you would fall backward into the hands of your friends and they would bear you up lest you dash your head against the ground. It was meant to be some sort of litmus test for your relationship with these people. But... what if the people who literally had your back were strangers? Or were people with whom you opening disagreed? In a word – they were NOT your friends. Would I be able – would you be able – to cross your arms and fall?

I do not think that it is an overstatement to say that trust has eroded in our world. Trusting people, institutions, authority is just not a given anymore.

Sociologists often point to the Nixon presidency and Watergate as the start of that erosion. When the president of the US can lie to the citizenry... who can we trust?

To be real: the lack of trust in some communities in America has been low from the time they set foot on this soil. People of color, Native peoples, immigrants: they live in a state of mistrust of authority figures. Who can we trust?

The church would say: GOD! But, when pastors and priests are being charged with atrocious crimes against minors? These people – people like me – like your pastor – are the ones who are supposed to instill trust, who are supposed to reflect the love and mercy and trustworthiness of God. When we fall down? Then there is an erosion of trust, and we hear a sincere cry of “Lord... to whom shall we go?”

And into this dearth of trust comes today’s reading from Matthew: trust that God has this whole enterprise and that one day it will all get sorted out. That’s what the parable of the weeds and wheat is in a nutshell. God is the one who will sort this all out – you just live together.

That is a big ask. And so we balk against it.

We make some walls around our hearts and communities: we won’t accept this person or that person because... Even if “All are Welcome” adorns our signs and sanctuaries, there are walls around our hearts where we just can’t imagine it is for THAT kind of person. And there are a lot of THOSE people depending on where you are: republicans, democrats, queer, homophobes, undocumented, ex-con, other Lutherans, Muslims...

Trust... not a given in our society. Not a given even in our churches.

What if we turn this parable on its head. What if we stop worrying about those weeds and what if we focus instead on the Farmer, the Sower, the Harvester.

What do we know about this One? Let’s look back...

The Old Testament reminds us that this One is on the side of the underdog – always. Abraham, a no-body. Sarah, an old, childless woman in a patriarchal society. Joseph, a braggart. David, an adulterer and murderer. Ruth, a foreigner.

God, our God, walked with people who goofed things up – who begged, borrowed, and stole. People who lied. God was faithful to them. Our faith foreparents were led out of slavery by God, but then made another god to worship. But God, our God did not abandon them. There is nothing that we can do that will turn God away from us.

In the New Testament we hear about Mary, another no-body. Peter, a denier. Judas, a betrayer. Paul, a persecutor. Mary of Magdala, a woman with a questionable background. Not a one was powerful or important or wealthy – well, except maybe Paul.

Even Jesus wasn't born in the most important town to the most influential people.

God, our God, chose to come and be among real people – real people with flaws and foibles. With biases and prejudices. To walk among all people. And Jesus chose to trust that God had a plan – a kingdom plan – for the WHOLE world.

Because in Jesus, God opened the gates of the kingdom to ALL people. That's what John's gospel tells us: For God so loved the WORLD. Not parts of that world, not only the wheat of the world. So loved the WHOLE world enough to send the Christ. Not for just a few – not just for the ones deemed acceptable.

To the tax collector, to the sinners, to the outcast: come and follow me.

To the self-righteous, to the stepped upon: come and follow me.

To the ones who feel unworthy, unloved: come and follow me.

To the ones who feel they carry the weight of the world: come and follow me.

To the ones who are sure that THOSE people are going to be the end of us: come and follow me.

NO ONE gets left out. No one gets set aside. No one gets harvested before their time.

Trust. Probably the hardest thing to do in our world today. And yet, faith is built on trust. And trust is built on hope.

My prayer is that hope may abound in your communities – that you might come to trust in the Lord with all your heart – that faith may be your rock. For our God is trustworthy. Always has been... always will be.