

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship: *Holy Ground (TFWS 2272)*

We are standing on holy ground,
and I know that there are angels all around;
let us praise Jesus now;
we are standing in his presence on holy ground.

- Geron Davis

Centering Words:

While we are waiting, God is waiting with us. God's promises are both now and yet to come. (*The Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 158*)

Affirmation of Faith: Apostles' Creed

Prayer of the Day:

Master of heaven and earth, we long to live in your Kingdom. We long to be good seed that bears fruit that nourishes. We long to bear fruit of love and unity so all people may be drawn by our fruit into your Kingdom.

But there are times when the enemy sows seeds in our hearts, seeds of hatred and division, seeds which drive people from your Kingdom.

Search us and know our hearts. Test us and know our thoughts. Remove from us the weeds of the enemy. Sow in our hearts and minds the seeds of your Kingdom, leading us into the way everlasting through Christ our Lord who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading Genesis 28: 10-19a

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

Epistle Reading Galatians 5: 16- 26

Special Music

Gospel Reading

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Sermon

Wheat or Weeds?

Hymn- *For One Great Peace (TFWS, 2185)*

This thread I weave, this step I dance,
this stone I carve, this ball I bounce,
this nail I drive, this pearl I string,
this flag I wave, this note I sing,

this pot I shape, this fire I light,
this fence I leap, this bone I knit,
this seed I nurse, this rift I mend,
this child I raise, this earth I tend,

this check I write, this march I join,
this faith I state, this truth I sign,
this is small part, in one small place,
of one heart's beat for one great Peace.

-Shirley Erena Murray

Benediction:

Go forth spreading seeds, which like wheat nourishes body and soul, so that all people may be drawn into the Kingdom of Heaven by our fruit. Amen

Response: *God Be With You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)*

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Matthew 13: 24-30. 36-43

Like many of you, Kay and I have been doing some binge watching on Netflix or some other streaming service during the past few months of staying in and not venturing out very much. One of the shows we have really binged on was *Anne with an E* on Netflix. It is based on the *Anne of Green Gables* stories by Lucy Maud Montgomery.

In one episode, Anne is making a cake to enter in the county fair. One of the key ingredients in the cake is vanilla. As Anne picks up the bottle of vanilla, she violently sneezes, dropping the bottle of vanilla which shatters all over the kitchen floor. In a panic she cleans it up. She dashes into the pantry, frantically searching the shelves. Finally, in the back she finds a bottle labeled vanilla. She breathes a sigh of relief and happily finishes the cake.

The next day at the fair it is time for the cakes to be judged. Anne is certain that she has a winning cake. The judges slice the cake. Each takes a forkful, puts it in their mouth, then violently spits it out crying, "It taste like liniment!"

Anne is crestfallen and does not understand. She followed the recipe exactly. Murilla, her adopted mother, asked Anne how she managed to put liniment in the cake. Anne explains that she broke the bottle of vanilla but found another bottle on the shelf labelled vanilla. Murilla realized then that she had long before poured some liniment in an old bottle of vanilla which Anne couldn't smell, because she had a cold the day she made the cake.

This parable, often called the wheat and the tares, is like that episode of *Anne*. There is one thing that appears good which in reality is bad.

A man sows the best wheat seeds he has in his field. Somebody, some enemy, comes at night and sows weeds in his field. It wasn't just any weed that was planted but a very specific weed, *zizania*, or darnel. In fact, the eight times this word, *zizania*, appears in the Bible is in this passage. So, Jesus is being very specific about the weed that is sown in the field.

Darnel is called false wheat for it looks like wheat to the untrained eye until it bears fruit. Ripe wheat is brown while ripe darnel is black. Of course, wheat is

good for you unless you are gluten intolerant. Wheat provides much of our nutritional needs. Wheat was the main staple of the diet in the ancient world and wheat bread tastes good. But darnel is poisonous. Darnel causes dizziness, vomiting and death if enough is consumed. Darnel may look like wheat but it doesn't taste like or have the benefits of wheat. In fact, it is the opposite of wheat.

Weeks after planting the best wheat seeds he could find, the man looks out over the grain that is beginning to ripen in his field and sees darnel among the wheat. Some enemy has thrown darnel seeds in his wheat field. That is the only explanation. He can not have his servants go pluck up the darnel, for in doing so they would damage the wheat. The only thing he can do is to let both the wheat and darnel ripen and separate them at the time of harvest, throwing the darnel in the fire.

Jesus identified the field as the world. Therefore, as God's agents in the world, we are God's field. God sows within us only good. God sows within us love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, all the fruits of the Spirit that Paul enumerates in Galatians. If you don't believe me, watch a bunch of three and four-year-old kids. They play together without recognizing differences. They play with uninhibited joy. Ask a three-year-old to dance and they will say watch me dance. Ask the same kid at 11 and they will mumble I don't know how to dance, I can't dance. Everything God sows within us is good. Everything God sows within us brings God's kingdom of love, peace and unity to fruition.

So why is there so much conflict and strife in the world? Why are we fighting over wearing a face covering in the midst of this pandemic? Why is there so much racial conflict? Why are people depressed and addicted? Why is there still so much poverty and hunger in the world? It is because God is not the only one sowing seeds in the field that is us. Satan is also tossing a few seeds around. Paul calls these seeds the works of the flesh, the works of the world. As we look at these works of the flesh that Paul enumerates, we see that all bring about discord, division, greed, self-centeredness, works that are the opposite of love, peace, and unity.

Satan is tossing around seeds of prejudice. Satan is tossing seeds of self-centeredness. Satan is tossing seeds of doubt. Satan is tossing seeds of fear. Satan

is tossing seeds of resentment. Satan is tossing seeds of greed. Satan is tossing seeds of vanity. Satan is tossing seeds that threaten to choke out the good seeds that God sows within each of us. Satan is tossing seeds that poison rather than nourish.

In the end God will take all that bear bad fruit, even though they may look good, as darnel looks like wheat, and throw them in the fire. There they will burn and be destroyed, never to poison the field of God's creation again.

Will we be the ones thrown in the fire? How will we know? How will I, John David Jordan (insert your full name) know if I am going to get tossed in the fire or shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father?

It will be by the fruit we bear. Will we bear wheat or will we bear darnel? Do we bear the fruit of the Spirit or the works of the flesh? There is, I believe, a relatively easy litmus test. Do we express love, peace, and unity, bringing people together or do we express hatred and bring about conflict and division?

If what we say, write, post on social media, or express in any other medium expresses love, peace, and unity, then we are bearing the fruit of the Spirit. We are bearing wheat. If what we say, write, post on social media or express in any other medium expresses hatred, conflict, and division, then we are bearing the works of the flesh. We are bearing darnel.

If what we do brings people together, regardless of any human label, and strives for peace and justice for all, then we are bearing fruit of the Spirit. We are bearing wheat. If what we do brings about or maintains division, conflict or injustice, then we are bearing works of the flesh. We are bearing darnel.

Even in our thoughts and attitudes which bring about peace, justice, and unity we bear fruit of the Spirit. We bear wheat in our thoughts and attitudes. But our thoughts and attitudes of hatred, oppression and conflict bear works of the flesh. We bear darnel even in our thoughts and attitudes.

So, we will stand before the Master with fear and trembling. We realize that there were times when we bore wheat, the fruit of the Spirit, but there were also times when we bore darnel, the works of the flesh. Will we be thrown in the fire or will we enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

That seems to be the point of this parable. It seems to be a parable of judgement. It points to the final judgement. But there is also grace in this parable. It subtly points to God's grace in that when the servants discover the darnel in the wheat and ask if they should gather the darnel, the master says wait. Wait until the crop has completely ripened, the wheat and the darnel, then we will harvest and separate the wheat from the darnel. Wait until completely ripe.

God waits until we are completely ripe. We are not judged as wheat or darnel by what we bear now, or in our past, but what we bear when we are completely ripe. For unlike wheat or darnel, which remains the same from planting to harvest, God can change us from darnel to wheat.

One of the most familiar hymns of invitation is *Just as I Am, Without One Plea*. We all know and love it. We love that sentiment that God accepts us just as we are, even if we are darnel. But as we read the verses carefully, we see that it is not just for God to accept us but to change us. "To rid my soul of one dark blot." "to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot." "...wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve." "to be thine yea thine alone" "O Lamb of God I Come" It is not just for God to accept us as we are but to change us to be as God intended for us to be.

We come to God as darnel, as weeds that bear the works of the flesh. But as we come to God, fearing the fire of the oven, God says, "Wait, let them ripen. Let me change them from weeds to wheat."

We let God change our thoughts and attitudes. We let God change what we do. We let God change our words- spoken, written and on social media. In everything we think, do or say we ask, does it bear wheat, fruit of the Spirit, or weeds, work of the flesh, and God changes us from weeds to wheat.

We are not ripe yet. We are ripening. May we ripen to bear wheat, the fruits of the Spirit, which bring love, peace and unity, so we may shine like the sun in the Kingdom of Heaven.