

Cotham July 23 2017

'The Lord is not slow but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance' – words from the 2nd letter of Peter 3.9.

In the name....

Teachers tend to make instant judgements. The new class walk into the room for the first time. There's the timid one, the arrogant, swaggering one. "That one will be trouble, you mark my words."

In my experience, there are two kids in each class that make teaching difficult. If both of them are absent at the same time, the class is totally transformed. More work gets done, the atmosphere is nicer. It's tempting to suggest that we identify the difficult two right at the start and exclude them, put them into some special school.

It's a temptation to be resisted. First, there's some sort of group dynamic at work. Every class seems to have the clown, the swot, the bully, the bullied, the naughty one and so on. If you remove some kids, other kids emerge to take on their roles. So if you weeded out the bad ones, there'd be more bad ones on the way. Second, people change. Every teacher can point to some little monster who grew up to be a well-adjusted individual. He or she wouldn't have turned out like that had they been judged and dumped at an early age.

So beware instant judgements. History is full of the tragedies they have caused. In Ruanda the Hutus massacred a million Tutsis. "If only we could get all the Jews out of our country, all would be well." said the Nazis. In former Yugoslavia the Serbs and Muslims were both intent on saving their country by driving out the bad guys. "Just get rid of the bad apples, and the rest of us would be perfect."

When Jesus told the parable of the weeds/tares/darnel there were many groups in society who thought they were right and wrote everyone else off: Many people would have easily identified the weeds as the Roman occupiers. The Zealots tried to bring about the kingdom through guerrilla tactics directed at them

For the Pharisees the answer wasn't violence against Rome. The solution was to create a safe garden where people could live out religious lives without contact with the weeds of this world. Their enemy wasn't Rome so much as anyone who neglected the law and its demands. They despised such persons as a major threat to the people of God. They called such persons "the people of the land": weeds. to be pulled and thrown out.

Jesus offended the Pharisees. While **they** excluded persons, Jesus was always including them. Tax collectors and sinners of all types could be found eating at the same table with Jesus. Jesus was going against an urge whose roots go way back into Old Testament times: The Jews had despised the Canaanites for centuries. When they entered the Promised Land with Joshua around 1200 B.C. they attacked the Canaanites who already lived there and drove them back. They considered the Canaanites to be "dogs:" uncouth, dirty, rotten, pagan scoundrels, weeds in this

promised land. Yet Jesus encouraged a Canaanite – and a woman at that to approach him (Come back on 20th August to hear her story.)

Human nature doesn't change. We've had the Spanish Inquisition, pogroms, civil wars. In the first crusades, the knights killed every Arab in a town. Later, they turned over the bodies and found crosses round almost every neck. It hadn't occurred to them that there could be Arab Christians. The church down the centuries has tended to define who is 'in' and looked down its nose at the rest. In the Salem witch trials of 1692 the church accused anyone who did anything out of the ordinary as being a witch, and the church executed them. Many innocent Christians were killed. The church assumed the role of the Gardener when it didn't have any gardening skills. The Church at the human level is just like all other institutions. *Your Way with God's Word* - D. Schlafer

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Actually, we don't have to go outside of ourselves to find an example. Our own motives get mixed, we experience the conflict between good and evil in our personal actions. Solzhenitsyn in the *Gulag Archipelago* wrote: If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

Martin Luther once said that all of us are *simul justus et peccator* - both 'saint' and 'sinner' - all of us have our good sides but we also all have the side of ourselves that has not been weeded out... that we hide away from the world... and sometimes we even hide from ourselves...

Jung explored the nature of the unconscious "shadow" that lives in each soul. The shadow gets filled with all the things that we repress because we don't want to know them: our unexamined greed, narcissistic selfishness. Out of sight this garbage rots and pollutes and unconsciously drives our actions. Jung believed that we need to learn to recycle our trash. By acknowledging our garbage and knowing it is always there, we are better able to understand ourselves, to grow and to act with true compassion towards ourselves and others.

So St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "...when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand." If only there were some "surgical procedure" by which to lance these evil defects from human life. But, there isn't. In this life, good and the evil are inextricably linked. "You have to take the bad with the good."

Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama wrote: 'God walks slowly because he is love. If he were not love he would have gone much faster.'

God allows evil to flourish with the good but only till he decides it is time for a harvest. Hitler and the concentration camps continued till the end of the holocaust; Russians were kept in terror of being sent to the Gulags of Siberia for seventy years. Then suddenly in 1989 the iron curtain was torn up and Communist governments toppled all over Eastern Europe. Wherever evil has taken over, there will eventually be a harvest that removes it - in God's good time.

When Peter said that the Lord is not slow but patient, he used the word μακροθυμία *makrothymia* = the art of 'taking a step back' in order to see the entire picture, and of accepting the incompleteness of the present.

Meanwhile, we should mind our own business. Our business is to be the inclusive body of Christ. As we celebrate this morning's eucharist we take bread. Apparently the weed/darnel in Jesus's story - "zinzanon," a nasty, bitter, weed, when newly sprouted, looks just like newly sprouted wheat. The two were indistinguishable! The Jewish people called it "bastard wheat." This plant would so entwine its roots with the wheat that to try to separate them early in the season would mean disaster for the wheat also. At maturity, the weight of the grain in the wheat bends the heads down. Since there's not much of anything in the heads of darnel, the plant continues to stand straight.

But if we attack the weed we become like it – poisonous and full of prickles so our job is to mind our business and stay wheat so that the body of Christ doesn't give the world bellyache. And to stay when we're tempted to walk out in despair: to stay rooted in God's goodness rather than uprooting ourselves or others in the fanaticism that destroys; staying not leaving; embracing, not excommunicating.

A psychoanalyst once said "Inside all of us there is a zoo, but we are to be the zoo keeper." Which means we must continue to take care of ourselves, to honour all the parts of our life, and realize that even the weeds come from God.

God worked through a drunken Noah, a murderous Moses. God worked through a polygamous Solomon, through Jacob, the sleazy con artist. He can work through us too. Grain is for bread making, the bread of the kingdom: a people blessed and broken, shared and consumed which nurtures and sustains this body gathered here this morning that we may be a living parable of God's harvest feast.

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