

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
July 17, 2011
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Scriptures: Genesis 32:22–31; Psalm 121; 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

That's Not My Job

Things have a way to get complicated. Last week we were all left feeling comforted knowing that God was in charge of the harvest. The sower doesn't even need to worry where to sow. Just spread the seed; God will make it grow. Some will give 30, others 70, and yet others 100 grains per seed. Even if the terrain is not receptive right away, we still have the assurance of a new upcoming season in which God's never ending love sows new seed. It doesn't get any easier than that, does it?

But today we have a different proposition. There are those, it seems, that don't want to see a successful harvest. There are, again it seems, those that indeed want to see the harvest fail. Those that go around sowing weeds instead of good seeds. The weeds that choke the good seed; the weeds that steal the nutrients off the earth the good seed needs to be fruitful. This indeed does not seem to be as easy as we have imagined.

The complication comes along with our reaction to that. You see, because we care so much about the harvest, we want to combat those weeds. We want to fight those that are intended on choking out the good wheat plants. We want to do something about it. "Let's purge our fields of all that harmful stuff," we say to ourselves. And of course there is good reason to react like that. We want to protect that which is good and noble. This is the cause of God, after all, and we feel called to fight the forces of evil against that which opposes God's will. One can't help but to remember that the church has been through this before. The crusades were supposed to be that holy war against things that are evil and we all know how that ended. So here's the question, is that our job? Are we the ones called to do the discernment between what stays and what needs to go? That's basically the question of those in the parable who ask the owner of the field if they should pluck the weeds growing amongst the wheat. The slaves—good slaves?—are anxious to take care of the problem. "Let's root it out; let's fight this curse." But Jesus points out that the solution can be worse than the problem. If you try to pluck out the evil weeds, you could also reap the good wheat. Let it be for now. *The owner of the field* will take care of it at the time of the harvest.

This brings to my mind the end of my first year at seminary. I remember when I was a practicing chaplain at the hospital. My idea was to bring all these "great things" I had to offer as a chaplain to those in need. But I also realized that I had the potential to do more harm than good if I was not careful with my words and actions. So I quickly learned to apply a medical principle to my ministry there: First, do no harm. It refers to the principle that given a particular situation, a doctor could choose to not do something or even not doing anything at all than to risk doing more harm than good. Now, I was not bearing a scalpel, or a needle, or anything like that, but I also knew that, well intentioned as I may

be, I had the potential to do harm. A neophyte still in pastor school playing how to save those who supposedly are in need of what he or she has to offer can be a dangerous thing. I had to be constantly checking, wondering, asking myself, what is happening here? What are the needs of this person/situation? And what I considered a more important question, what is *God* doing for this person/situation?

And there's the key, I think. Perhaps Matthew's readers had some overzealous "weeders" who wanted to purify their community of faith. Maybe there were those who thought they knew the difference between weeds and wheat. Perhaps there were those who thought they knew exactly what they needed to do with those weeds. Perhaps they thought God needed them to be in charge of cleaning out the house. But Jesus makes it clear that any attempt to root out the weeds can end up doing more harm than good. How many congregations have you heard of where one takes the responsibility to "clean out" the problematic ones? You know, those who know what is "right" versus what is "wrong." More churches have been harmed by the attempts to clean out than those that have tried to live out their mission even in the midst of things that are often difficult to discern. Jesus makes it clear that we simply can't be certain of who's in and who's out. In fact, God's judgment will more often surprise us as it is more likely that we will find ourselves to be on the losing end of things.

You know what, in the end, we are happy that this is not up to us. The harvest indeed continues to be that of God and that is a good thing. It is a good thing because we can count that God, the owner of the field, will see that indeed there will be a crop at the end of the season. Yes, weeds do grow up and yes the enemy is constantly looking for ways to cast weeds among the wheat, but in the end that is an issue that God, the just God, will see that is properly handled. What do we do in the mean time? There's still a ministry to do. There's still people to love. There's still a community to serve. All we are called to is to continue the ministry that God has entrusted to us. To proclaim that good news that God has proclaimed to us in the first place. The rest will be taken care of by the love, compassion, mercy and also justice of God. Amen.