

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
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Church of the Holy Cross
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Good Seeds and the Weeds

One of the challenges in writing a sermon is finding the meaning in the scripture, but right here at the end, Jesus explains all the parts and players in the parable, and then gives us the bottom line—evil doers in this world will be collected up when Jesus comes back. They will be thrown into the fire, and there will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth—not pretty. The righteous however, will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father. “Let anyone with ears listen.” I am so glad Matthew explained it all for us, so we can just get on with coffee hour! Actually, I had to read this a few times including in different translations. A few main points stood out for me. First, I want to acknowledge that good and evil do exist. The devil exists, Jesus knew it, he wrestled with him for 40 days. Then it occurred to me that our best-laid plans end where others’ plans begin—there is overlap, we are not in this alone. And finally, with the perspective that I gained from this passage, I had to ask myself, what do I “do” next?

Good and Evil do exist, and there will be a separation of the good and the wicked at the end of the age. This reminded me of what St. Paul said a few weeks ago in his letter to the Romans, “Why is it that I do what I hate?” Why? Because we are human and we fall into temptation. Temptation comes because evil exists. Jesus said I have come that you may have Joy. The enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy our joy. With good and evil, we tend to think in terms of us and them, and we are always the good guys. I prefer to think in terms of choices we have every day either to do good or to give into temptation. The evil one is cunning. To keep you from doing the right thing, evil sometimes disguises itself as pretty good deeds that keep us busy, but really steal away time we should dedicate to living into the fullness God created us to be, which is very, very good. Evil is clever. A few years ago, I knew that I should visit my parents, cook them a meal, do some basic chores, and spend some time playing cards and visiting. I began to think, the house will be hot, it is a long drive and I will need to stay overnight, and I will see them in July...but I should go. All of a sudden, evil whispered in my ear: “It would be good to get your closet cleaned out and take things to Goodwill—get your own house in order!” Then for the icing on the cake, a second whisper reminded me I could help at church on Sunday if I did not go out of town. I would see my parents in another month, and I could do some good right here. In my case, it was not the right thing to do. Closet cleaning, Goodwill donating, and volunteer work are good deeds, but they were lesser good deeds. The gift of my love and my time with my Mom and Dad was not productive for me, but it was the good I should have chosen. A week or so after I chose to stay home, my Dad had a stroke and was moved to a nursing facility. I would never again get to sit at the kitchen table and play cards with both my parents. “The all about me” mode is one where I pick ministries based on my productivity, my time constraints, and my best interests. God wants us to glorify Him, not just do what we like to do and are skilled at. Not just good deeds, but great deeds that bear fruit.

Your best-laid plans end where the plans of others overlap. It happens all the time. People plan, God laughs. I am not saying that we should not plan. We need to prepare for the future, especially in times of uncertainty. But, what I take from this scripture is the idea that ultimately, I do not rule the world. I am not in control of everything in my world; in fact, I am in control of very little, as are all of us. At best, we can only control our own words, thoughts, and actions. We can choose between good and evil.

What struck me about the parable of wheat and weeds, was how it so closely relates to our everyday life. We are not alone here—all good Christians, trying to do the right thing. We live in a world with many different kinds of people, some good and some evil—sometimes even right next door—living, growing, sharing resources, but not ideals, morals, or values—in other words, there are weeds all around us. And as Jesus himself has said, “God sends the rain on the good and the evil alike.” So how well are you doing,

living with the weeds, and answering Jesus' call to hospitality, and obeying the commandment to love one another?

When talking about good and evil, we always ask this question: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" I am not sure there is ever a good answer to this. I think a more interesting question is, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" The Rev. Dr. Luis Leon always says, "God offers us maximum support, but minimum protection" against the evil in the world. That is, God supports us in doing right and good things that are blessings to each other, but God does not protect us from harm that may come at another's hands.

God does not protect us from the weeds, and sometimes the weeds even seem better off. Every day I bet the weeds win the lottery, the weeds get promoted, and the weeds take great vacations—why them? Do the weeds get a \$200 ticket for speeding in Falls Church City? No. Just the other day, a weed blew through a stop sign—not a cop in sight. Our inclination is to judge others—but God alone is the final judge. It is difficult for us to refrain from judging others while we are dealing with our own challenges. Here we are trying to do the right thing, live an honest life, not lying, stealing, cheating, while all around us the weeds are having a great time and doing all these things. It is tough to watch.

What other people do is not for us to judge, and we have to trust that in the end, the weeds will be taken up and thrown on the fire. We are accountable only for ourselves. I found this same message in the text from Romans as well. We heard that we should not live according to the flesh—feeding our worldly wants and desires, but we should live by the Spirit—live into our birthright as children of God—to me this is doing the good that will bear fruit, the good that matters. If I live in the Spirit and not the flesh, the angels will not be confused at what I have grown into when they come to collect the weeds.

Trusting that God will take care of the "weeds" we see growing around us is not easy, and we are tempted to take judgment into our own hands. The challenge is to focus on who we are, and how God wants us to live. Let the rest of the world worry about itself. I only need to just be Jamie, a child of God, that is what I am called to do. Just be yourselves and grow into the goodness that God has imagined for you. Live and thrive as the good seed that God planted you to be. Be true to yourself, and trust God to take care of the rest. What you do matters—go into all the world and bear fruit!

OK, so good and evil do exist, our plans end where the plans of others begin—now, what do we do? I am not at all sure if it is enough to simply be a good seed. We came into this world alone, we will leave this world alone, and what we do while we are here matters. What we grow into, matters. And, it is not easy to focus on the positive and to resist evil. In fact, some people are genetically predisposed to spot negative events automatically, according to a study published in *Psychological Science*. However, just because there is a gene that influences our starting point, that doesn't stop us having some control over where we end up. *We need to "accent-chu-ate the positive, E-lim-inate the negative, latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with mister in-between!"*

That evil whisper telling us to do pretty good things instead of the great things we can do with God's help. What do we do now that we have this perspective? Choose to be happy. We cannot control the actions of others, but we can choose to do the right thing and we can choose not to do those things that we hate. I have quoted, Viktor E. Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, many times. "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." In that space is our ability to choose. A moment when we decide what we will do. Space to take a breath, pause, think and then respond. In that space is our opportunity to be obedient to Jesus' call to love each other and show hospitality. Choose Love. Choose the good. Choose to grow and bear fruit. Amen.