

Seeds & Weeds

A sermon presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented Sunday, July 23rd, 2017
at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of The Seeds and The Tares (otherwise known as weeds) is ridiculous if one considers the reality of such a diabolical, deliberate method of destroying a wheat crop. But, if one has ears to hear what the parable is saying - "an enemy has done this"- it becomes a profound exposé of the very nature of evil.

The disciples were puzzled by this parable and asked Jesus to explain it. He replied by saying that at the end of the age the angels of God would separate the evil from the good. The lessons of this parable are clear, but they are not easy. The parable helps us to understand that there will always be weeds in the wheat field. One of the last things that Jesus said to his disciples was: "In the world you will always have trouble." Life is difficult. Jesus never promised us that we might become so good or so wise that no tares would ever grow in our wheat fields. Things happen in our world and in our lives that are beyond our power to prevent ~ and beyond our power to fix. No matter how hard we work or how good we may be, something or someone comes by while we are sleeping and sows weeds in our field. When we discover weeds in the wheat field, we should not belittle ourselves or despair. We live in an imperfect world where evil is present as an unavoidable part of life.

Jesus teaches us that there are situations in life so tangled that they can never be untangled in this world. There are knots which no mortal can untie. We tend to be a generation that believes everything that goes wrong is amenable to the quick fix. We spend billions of dollars each year for medication to deaden our physical and emotional pain. Our culture encourages this flight to the quick fix by assuring us we can have a pain free life, but this is a myth. Avoidance does not conquer pain but merely delays it while the real problem grows larger and more complicated.

The helping professionals are confronted constantly by people who demand, and are willing to pay for, an immediate solution to whatever may be troubling them. It is shocking to discover that most of the painful problems in our lives and in our world that we cannot fix cannot be fixed by professional fixers either. There are problems that lie beyond our power to fix, at least in the manner in which we are expected to fix them. Is there any counsel of hope?

Recently, a friend recalled an interesting and instructive family experience. He said it was one of those days in which everything had already done wrong with every member of the family. His school teacher wife was trying to prepare the evening meal to the tune of two crying children, when something boiled over on the stove. She threw up her hands and began to cry. My friend said that this happened to be one of the times in which he managed to remain calm, and he quietly asked his wife, "What can I do?" Between sobs she said, "Nothing! Just hold me for a moment." There are times in which there is nothing you can do except to give comfort. If this is all that you can do, then, it is enough.

This parable teaches us that there is an evil force afoot in the world. There are evil persons and evil situations which we cannot change in the manner in which Christians usually think of dealing with a problem. In his book about evil entitled *People of the Lie*, Dr. M. Scott Peck tells of his attempt to rescue a child from evil parents. He makes a philosophical statement about evil. He said: "I have learned nothing in 20 years (as a psychiatrist) that would suggest that evil people can be rapidly influenced by any other means than raw power. They do not respond, at least in the short run, to either gentle kindness, or any form of spiritual persuasion with which I am familiar." This statement is devastating to those of us who were brought up to believe that love, gentle kindness and spiritual

persuasion can solve any problem. There is an evil force in the world which is beyond our power to fix.

The parable teaches us that it is not always easy to distinguish the good and the bad. Sometimes what we think to be a bad person turns out to be good, and the person we first thought to be good may turn out to be evil. The parable teaches us not to be quick in our judgments. This is not a way of coddling evil, but the only sure way of protecting the good. Patience must not be read as passivity. The weeds which are not distinguishable from the wheat at one stage will become clearly recognizable at harvest time by God who alone has the wisdom, the power, and the right to judge.

What does this parable in particular have to say to people who live each day with problems that are beyond their power to fix? The Gospel solution is not a quick fix. It is a life-long commitment to the kind of faith and love that is so clearly seen in Jesus. It is not easy. It is not quick. It defies explanation, but when you see it lived out in the life of Jesus, no explanation is needed.

Let me tell you a story. The first African-American baseball player in the American League was a rookie by the name of Larry Doby. He played for the Cleveland Indians in 1947. He was reputed to be a good player, and an excellent hitter. He came to bat in this first game, and the fans waited to see. It was a disaster. He swung at the first three pitches and missed them all by at least a foot. He struck out. The fans "booed" him off the field. Larry Doby stared at the ground as he walked back to the dugout. He went to the end of the bench, sat down, and put his head in his hands.

The next batter was second baseman Joe Gordon, an All Star hitter, who had always hit this particular pitcher well. Everyone knew he could not only hit the ball, he could put it out of the park. He stepped up to the plate, swung at the first three pitches and missed each pitch by at least a foot. A huge silence fell over the crowd. Joe Gordon stared at the ground as he walked back to the dugout. He went to the end of the bench, sat down by Larry Doby, and put his head in his hands. Even today people wonder, did he strike out on purpose? Of course, nobody knows for sure, except Joe Gordon. But, I can tell you this. It is reported that from that day on, Larry Doby never went on the baseball field but that he did not reach down and pick up the glove of his teammate, Joe Gordon, and hand it to him.

What manner of love is this? It did not cure the problem of prejudice in the stadium that day, but it did represent everything that one person could do at that time and place and under that circumstance. If you have done all that you can with some problem that is beyond your power to fix it is enough. God will finish the job at harvest time.

I cannot fix you. You cannot fix me. And you cannot fix you. Do not put your ultimate faith in me, or in yourself, or in any other human being. Our ultimate faith is best placed in God! Wait for the Lord of the Harvest who will fix everything, you included, when the Lord comes.