

## Homily for Pentecost 7, 2020

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

*'The parable of the weeds'*

Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

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### INTRODUCTION

Among the many objections people have to Christianity and belief in God generally,

Without doubt the biggest one is what's often called the 'problem of evil'.

When it's put in its abstract philosophical version:

It sounds something like this:

*'If God is all powerful,*

*if God is all knowing,*

*And if God is completely good...'*

All of which Christians believe,

*'Then how can there be evil and suffering in the world?'*

But more commonly you'll hear this problem expressed,  
not in a theoretical way,

But in a personal way,

In how we experience life,

You'll simply hear people say,

*'Why?'*

Why is life so hard?

Why did my loved one get sick?

Why did God let x, y, z, happen to us? To me?

\*

In the Bible although we never get a nice neat answer to the problem of evil, it is addressed in a number of different books in a number of different ways.

And our text is one of those.

So today let's unpack this parable of the weeds and its explanation from this particular angle,

And as we do we'll look at three main things:

first at the **reality** of evil,

Second at one of our natural **responses** to evil,

And third to the final **reckoning** of evil.

The **reality**, the **response** and the **reckoning**.

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## REALITY

So first is the **reality** of evil in the world.

This may sound like an obvious first point,

But it's worth touching on,

because there are worldviews which deal with this problem by denying the very existence of evil,

Or somehow explaining it away.

Whereas the Scriptures are very realistic that evil is real, it's just there.

It's as much a reality of life in this world as are weeds,

Jesus says.

This of course is the very famous picture of the presence of evil in the parable,  
That of weeds.

The sower sowed good seed in his field,

But while everyone was asleep, after a hard days' work,

Something sinister happens,

An enemy comes under the cover of night,  
and sows weeds among the wheat.

Who was this enemy?

In the actual parable, not the explanation.

Perhaps a neighbouring farmer who wanted the market share all to himself?  
perhaps an ex-employee bearing a grudge and so wanting to sabotage the  
business?

We're not told the motivation,  
Just that this enemy is trying to ruin the master's harvest.

So when the workers see the plants beginning to grow,

They begin to notice something strange,

There's something else growing in among their plants,

And it's not just a stray seed here and there,

They can see evidence of something intentional,  
Something sinister.

*'Master, didn't' you sow good seed in your field,  
Where did these weeds come from?'*

\*

Sound familiar?

Lord, why is there evil in the world?

As we experience evil and suffering in our world we can be as shocked as the workers in the parable.

Isn't this God's world?

Isn't God at work in this world bringing about blessing and goodness?

So where did the weeds come from?

Where does this evil come from?

Now the parable and the explanation are clear in the first place,  
that it's certainly not from God.

An enemy did this, the farmer says,

And Jesus clearly identifies this enemy as the devil.

So Jesus not only recognizes the reality of evil in this world,  
But he goes further and identifies a personal supernatural being as the source of  
this evil.

Now this can be hard for some modern people to take,  
But notice Christians believe in the existence of the devil and demons,  
Simply because Jesus did.

And it's not just an easy answer to the problem of evil,  
Because it still leaves us with the mystery of why God allows the devil to do  
what he does.

Which the Scriptures don't seem particularly interested in delving into those sorts of questions,

But Jesus acknowledging that there is an ultimate enemy of God,  
One who is entirely opposed to God, the devil,

This does mean we take the problem of evil very very seriously,

Evil's not just a delusion,  
It's not just bad luck,

It's a reality of this fallen world,

It's just there,  
like weeds.

\*

## **RESPONSE**

But then next is the *response* to this reality of evil,

There are many ways we can respond,  
But this is one way that Jesus wants to deal with here,

The response that's singled out, quite naturally,

Is to want to get rid of the evil,

But more specifically,  
To get rid of the *evil-doers*.

So notice how the workers in the parable respond when they see the weeds.

They suggest the obvious, I would've thought,  
Let go do some weeding,

They've worked too hard on this beautiful crop,

Let's get rid of these weeds.

But then the surprise comes,

The master says 'no',

He won't let them pull out the weeds because he says they'll uproot the wheat as they do.

It almost feels to me like there's the wise old farmer,  
And the young impulsive workers,

They're all worked up about this and perhaps the farmer can see that they're  
anger and frustration means they'll make a mess of this.

So, the farmer says something like:

just be patient,  
Let them keep growing,

We'll sort it out at harvest time.

\*

I did some weeding just the other week.

But modern weeding,  
With weed spray.

But even then,  
These sorts of things Jesus describes can happen.

At one point I was moving across the lawn from one patch of weeds to another  
and the lever that you press down on the sprayer got stuck,  
So the spray kept spraying,

And now there's a lovely line of dead grass across where I walked!

I only wanted to kill the weeds,  
But I accidentally got rid of some of the good growth in the process.

\*

Jesus seems to be teaching us that something like this can happen in how we approach evil in the world,  
And even in the church.

You see evil in the world,  
you may even sense some weeds creeping into the life of the church,  
and you ask God, why?

And then,  
maybe you ever feel the urge to take matters in your own hands?

To get rid of the evil.

But so easily that desire to be rid of evil,

Becomes a desire to purge the world from those evil people?  
Perhaps to purify the church from all those who we think shouldn't be there?

We can surely recognize these temptations.

Who doesn't want to live in a community free of evil?  
Who doesn't want to be in a church full of healthy wheat and free of toxic weeds?

Of course, that's what we want!

And remember the first point today,  
The evil is there,

It is real,

But this second point is to make clear that when it comes to it's removal,  
That ultimately is not our job.

*'Vengeance is the Lord's'* the Scriptures say.

Now as we'll see in the rest of the parable,

Jesus isn't saying there aren't real evil-doers in the world,  
Even that there aren't real weeds in the visible church,

But the problem is that as fallible human beings we simply can't tell the  
difference,

We won't get it right,

Because we're not God.

And so,  
Jesus says,

Let it go,  
I'll sort it out later.

There's a call to patience here and recognizing God's timing.

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## **RECKONING**

There's the *reality* of evil,

The *response* to evil,

And finally the *reckoning* of evil.



The only way Jesus teaching here makes sense,  
The only way we can forgo the desire to get rid of evil ourselves,  
Is that Jesus still does promise that evil will not go unchecked forever,  
The farmer isn't going to leave the weeds alone indefinitely,  
It's not a matter of *if* the weeds need to be removed,  
It's just a matter of *who* does it, and *when*.

The reapers will take care of that at harvest the farmer says,  
The angels will take care of that at the end of the age, Jesus says.  
There will be a reckoning with evil and it's serious business.

*<sup>41</sup>The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup>and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

And although that is confronting language,

Can you see how it does speak to that problem of evil in a necessary way?

Because if this life is all there is,  
Then there is no justice,  
Evil does go seemingly unchecked,

And the temptation to deal with it ourselves now is far greater.

But the Scriptural worldview includes a final judgment,

A reckoning,

It tells us that even though you experience evil in this world in all sorts of ways,

It's not because God doesn't take it seriously,

He takes it very seriously,

He takes it seriously enough to speak of 'furnaces of fire' and 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

But again,  
that's his domain,  
Not ours.

\*

But dear Christian people,  
Don't you fear that fiery furnace,  
Because Jesus has already been there for you.

We do need to take this teaching of Jesus to heart and not shy away from the harder words of our Lord,

But we also need to remember that the very one who gives this teaching,

Is the same one who goes to the cross to give his life for the world,  
To give his life for you,

The one who will one day execute justice at the end of the age including the fiery furnace,  
first goes through his own fiery furnace on the cross, taking God's wrath against all sin and evil on himself.

And he rises again,  
and he sends his Spirit into our hearts so we can be those children of the kingdom,  
with the promise of shining like the sun in the Father's kingdom.

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## CONCLUSION

There's the reality of evil,  
The response to evil,  
And the reckoning of evil.

And so the parable of the weeds does help us in thinking through that difficult  
and ever-present 'problem of evil',

But ultimately the deepest answer to it in Christian faith,  
Is the cross.

Jesus doesn't ultimately explain evil and suffering,

Instead he comes and enters into the darkness of it *with* us,

And overcomes it *for* us.

God grant it to us for Jesus' sake, Amen.