

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

Isaiah 44:6-8  
Psalm 86:11-17  
Romans 8:12-25  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

There are many visions of glory to be had in Connecticut in the summertime. We plan on going to the Yale School of Music summer concert series in Norfolk, CT, next week. It's usually cool enough there in the so-called "icebox" of CT at a 1230 foot elevation to settle into an evening picnic before the concert, relaxing on the slope of a valley on which you can take in the lush green surroundings and look towards waning light in the west. Then, if you haven't found the Sublime in the surroundings, you are bound to hear a heavenly sound from the concert. Is this "the Kingdom of Heaven come near?" you might ask yourself. Sometimes it seems, indeed, quite Divine at the Norfolk festival. Or perhaps for you it is a Connecticut shore day. Or a simple picnic with your family. Perhaps you found the Kingdom of Heaven was here at Bethesda when you as a congregation chanted with Pastor Keyl on the last Sunday in June those very words: *the Kingdom of Heaven has come near*. It was the start of the green season, and you got a reminder to keep your eyes open and ears perked for the signs of the Kingdom. Where, indeed, since then, have you found the Kingdom of Heaven breaking into our world?

This morning's parable from the heart of Matthew's gospel—chapter 13, verifies indeed, that the seeds of the Kingdom *have* been sown all about us. Last week we heard that some had a better chance of maturing than others – however this morning it sounds like there is good soil aplenty in a Kingdom rooted everywhere with us – kind of like the great Midwestern fields of wheat that sway and billow under a Great Plains wind. With this view of plenty – and Potlatch-like abundance, we know we will, as disciples, see greater things than the angels ascending and descending on heavenly ladders. Dave Daubert, in this month's issues of *The Lutheran*, for

example, suggests that when the petitions of the Lord's Prayer are answered, *God's reign is breaking in our midst – people are fed, forgiven, empowered and free*. To be sure, Christ is present in the Word and Sacraments of a service of worship and we can depend on that. Yet, God is not limited by what we can name or by what we, ourselves, can surmise from scripture. Holy presence is up to *God's* action and we may be graced to receive it beyond water, Word and bread and wine.

Now there's a classical theological debate about whether or not we can hone ourselves to at least be better receivers of that gracious action. Emil Brunner and Karl Barth debated this- Brunner saying "yes" and Barth famously saying "no", and it seems in our time Douglas John Hall is inviting us to revisit the question. But for my two cents in the debate, it seems to me, when our rational capacities are honed and groomed, and just when we feel ourselves to be sharpened and perhaps more "sensitized to receive," what is it that we actually notice all the more? Chances are, as eloquently named by the second lesson, what we actually see, when we're honest, is more the Creation *in bondage to decay*. We see a creation "subjected to futility." We see- circumstances which inhibit the use of our talents. We see facts that dampen our joy. We see the groaning Creation: children dying of malnutrition in the horn of Africa; stories of pain in our congregations; limitations of all sorts that prevent us from getting involved in meeting other's needs. A particularly gruesome story this week was the murder an eight year old Jewish boy in Borough Park, Brooklyn, trying to find his way home from day camp –with the likely suspect in the murder who was also Jewish. So, too, churches see distress and division and church leaders who disappoint and are investigated as corrupt. And we can only pray, "Thy Kingdom come..." sometimes seemingly bereft of any salvation at hand.

The weeds, the *darnel* of the gospel, have been sown into this field. It is not simply a great mono-crop of Midwestern wheat. Evil is also present. What is of evil origins is also in our faith communities, as well, we can infer. Now it gets more insidious, because *since* we think good is in ourselves and not God, then we believe we can identify both the wheat and the weeds and, by George, do something about this mess. We willingly make in ourselves our own good, says Augustine, instead of seeking our good in God. We cling to our “old Adam (and Eve)” our way of doing things through fear of punishment or in hope of reward. Our righteous zeal becomes contrary to the law of God.

What are we to do with these two contrasting images: a lush field of wheat bountiful and undulating, sights of the Kingdom potentially all around – and yet then again, the worst of times that we see? Jesus puts a lesson in front us today –a lesson of plants coming up together. When they are in the stalk phase, apparently you cannot tell wheat from darnel weeds in that they are similar in structure. So you “don’t do something about it –just sit there”, then. How about that for a “can-do” approach? So, yes instead we pick apart those stalks – believing that surely we are expert enough or practiced enough to be able to do the weeding – what is “necessary” for healthy communities. And here’s the scandal. For sometimes, even when we can name evil- it’s not ours to correct. What a stumbling block. This is not to say that pedophile priests should not be removed from their work, rather that the “harvest time” is not always upon us and we can’t always know the times or God’s plan, nor know exactly how we stand in this field of wheat and weeds.

So we are schooled this morning in a different wisdom, indeed; of a value different than action and pragmatism. That value, instead, is that of *patience*. We know the value of patience, as well, from the Biblical story of Gamaliel, who counseled against persecuting the apostles, saying

eventually their work would fail, anyhow, if it were not from God. You wonder how is it that we don't employ this answer – this with an obvious Biblical star seal of approval – more often. My hunch is that while it may be good counsel, it is not easy to do. For often to be patient is to know humiliation and that is not easy, even if we strive to model our lives on Christ's. Yet to follow Christ's exultation is also to share in Christ's suffering.

*A young man came to George Goodman, a noted English Bible instructor at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and said, "Mr. Goodman, I wish you would pray for me that I might have patience." Mr. Goodman answered, "Yes, I will pray for you that you have tribulation." "Oh, no, sir," the young man replied, "it is patience that I want." "I understand," said the Bible teacher, "and I will pray for you that you may have tribulation."*

*The astonished and disturbed young man was shown a passage in the Bible: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience (Romans 5:3, KJV) (NRSV: suffering builds endurance.)"*

*Some of the people of God have patience – a resigned patience that cannot honor God very much. But there are instances, and they constitute a real testimony to the faithfulness and goodness of the Lord, where the joy of the Lord is the strength of God's suffering child. Life is lived; one breath at a time, in patience so mixed with the joyfulness that only can be seen in the midst of suffering. That life is seen as the life of God.<sup>1</sup>*

As Israel suffered during the exile in Babylon, in a strange country, under foreign rule, set at tasks that were also oppressive, humiliating and demeaning, they questioned, indeed, was God? Patience was worn past "thin" to worn away. Was there any wheat at all in this existence

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<sup>1</sup> Let Me Illustrate, Donald Barnhouse, Fleming H. Revell Co., Westwood, NJ, 1967.

dominated by tares? Even God sees that folks may be turning to Babylonian Gods. But God sends the Word from on high, Low! – There is a case to be made, for my name and my name alone. Despite what it looks like all around. ...***Do not fear or be afraid. Have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.***

When we go about being hearers of the Word this summer, and take a foray into discipleship through Jesus' parables and teachings, can we find a joy of the Kingdom so strong that we *not* to uproot that which seems to be blocking our view. Do we hear a Word in the midst of nuances, even a mix of good and evil, of faith and faithlessness? The joy of our trusted relationship as a child of God pours forth. For we trust that God acts. The story may be building, the plot thickening and it may be 3 o'clock in the afternoon on Calvary: can we believe we're called to simply to look on? Patience might not be the right word here—rather, *faith*. To do that, we need *faith: faith* that there is a foundation of goodness that cannot be dissolved; *faith* that God *is* a rock; *faith* that we are granted freedom and grace even as we live in times of ambiguity; *faith* that we can take on God's light yoke, helping bear it up even in our outrage; *faith* that the harvest time does come; *faith* that God's timing is perfect timing; *faith*, through which we walk with God.

Apparently wheat and *Bearded Darnel* – the weed of the story– are immediately distinguishable at harvest time. The wheat grain head droops whereas darnel stands straight. But you have to wait for the “head” phase of the plant. These differences are lost in the “stalk phase.” When the story becomes resolved in God's good time... all will be well. God grant us the faith that undergirds us in the time of the growth from stalk to head. AMEN.

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