

July 23, 2017 Year A Matt: 13:24-30, 36-43

Today's readings offer us a wonderful opportunity to focus on stories. The stories we tell both illuminate and teach the virtues that our communities respect. Stories transmit culture, values and ethics. Stories often include images and actions that raise questions and confirm values. In our church communities, we tell concrete stories that illustrate our beliefs, rather than using abstract language to try to explain our theology. The book of Genesis contains the foundational stories of our faith, while the gospels contain both the story that Jesus lived and the stories that Jesus told his community of followers.

In a classic strip of the famed "Peanuts" newspaper cartoon, Lucy explains to her little Linus about the existence of good and evil. She tells him that he, like others, have inside these two forces. Linus looks at

his stomach with a distressed look on his face and

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declares, "I can feel them in there fighting."

In today's gospel we find Jesus telling a parable that uses a similar image-good wheat and evil weeds fighting it out in a farmer's field. It's also the same story in whatever newspaper any of us read this morning - good and evil fighting it out in the world. There is a force at every level of existence that works against what is good and what is God. There is a force that seeks to destroy the loving nature of creation. There is a force that exerts every effort to suck the lifeblood out of everything that promotes prosperity and health and hope and peace and joy. Throughout the ages, the faithful have personified this sinister force by many names: Satan, the devil, Beelzebub, Lucifer, or "the evil one." By whatever designation we choose, its intent, its nature, is to unmake what God has created and to deface, distort,

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and destroy whatever good it may latch onto, as it eats away at it with parasitic intensity.

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Through today's parable, Jesus gives us an illustration of the power of the evil force that can invade every aspect of life. He makes this clear by painting a picture of weeds growing alongside wheat, imitating the good grain and intertwining its roots and growth with what was planted by the farmer, who stands for Christ. And how did the weed get into the field? Jesus says simply that the weed came from an enemy, the devil, the evil one.

"An enemy of God" is as good an answer as we will ever find for the source of that which works against God. In the service of Holy Baptism, we know this enemy as "all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God," or as "the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of

God," or "all sinful desires that draws us from the love of God." We recognize at the very beginning of our life in Christ that we are constantly invaded by

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the "weeds."

And though we renounce the evil that the weeds represent, we also recognize something else in our baptismal vows. We see that our lives, like the field in the parable, grow with evil intertwined among the grace, love, and godly obedience that we promise to trust and employ in our Christian living. And we know from experience that no matter how intent we are to follow our vows, none of us will ever totally avoid the corrupting influences and tempting thoughts that lead us to go against the values of God.

Maybe that's what makes so many of us anxious to do something about perceived forms of evil in our close communities and in the wider world. In today's parable, Jesus has the slaves ask almost immediately

whether they should destroy the weeds. That sounds like a natural reaction, doesn't it? What farmer would not seek to destroy weeds that suck vital nutrients from a well-planted crop? Wasn't that

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our first reaction when we experienced the evil of the 9/11 attacks? When human beings think they know the source and reality of evil, they almost always want to pinpoint it and do away with it as swiftly and certainly as possible. Seeing with what we assume is a crystal-clear view of what is good and what is evil, we move ahead, absolutely certain that we are right and just in eradicating what seems obviously ungodly.

But history shows how often this is folly. Any number of "witch hunts" reveal that they were more about making the hunters feel secure than actually doing something about evil. Still, we often have a strong urge, when threatened and fearful, to find something to cut out, weed out, push down, crush, or otherwise stop and destroy. Should we not admit

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that this kind of behaviour often simply functions as an escape from the more complex reality? That's the argument that Jesus seems to be laying out in his response to the slaves who would dig out the weeds

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Wait, (he has the farmer insist) until time for the harvest because the process of ripping out the weeds will certainly destroy the wheat in the process. Doesn't this ring true in the depths of our confessions? Don't we really know this truth-that the evil is strongest when it disguises itself as good and manages to incapacitate the creatures of God with the resulting confusion?

This truth is hard to accept, as we find Jesus telling us something we really don't want to hear - to leave the judging until later, to recognize that throwing the weeds into the fire is God's job, not ours. When we encounter what we see as evil, we want to find the source and destroy it. We often are impelled by the false wisdom of "Don't just stand there, do something!" But as he so often does, Jesus uses this

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parable to make us rethink our human reactions, and he turns us in an opposite direction by having the owner say, in effect, "Don't just do something, stand there!" Wait to let the nature

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of the godly prosper and prevail in due course. Profoundly, Jesus is leading us to cease chasing after the bad, and rather concentrate on the good.

The farmer could tolerate the actions of his enemy because he knew he would make it all right in the harvest, reaping the good and destroying the bad. Jesus is saying to us that we can relax in knowing that we don't have to be in the judgement business or in the business of destroying that which would work against God, because the owner of the farm, God himself, will make it all come out right in the end.

So we are left finally, with a teaching that we would do best by paying less attention to the weeds - the evil in life - and simply staying away from it. Better

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for us to spend more time tending the wheat - the good in life - fostering its growth and putting it to use as Jesus would have us do, following the values of God's Kingdom. AMEN

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