

Proper 11A

Grace to you and Peace, from God, our Father and te Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week we heard about the sower and the seeds. Like most Hollywood movies today's lesson about the wheat and the weeds (also known as the wheat and the tares) is the sequel to last weeks parable. Part two if you will. It seems the sower has sown good seed on fertile ground and one of his dishonest competitors has tossed in weed seeds.

A historical note here. The sower in the story told the servants not to pull up the weeds. "for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest..."

What you and I don't realize – living in America over 2000 years after this story was told, is that the type of weed planted among the grain looked virtually identical to the good stuff early in the growing cycle. Only as the plants matured close to harvest could one definitively tell the wheat from the weeds. Pulling the weeds early meant pulling out a lot of good plantings because they looked so much alike. End of history lesson.

When we hear this story, we mostly focus on the wrong thing. That is we focus on the gathering and burning of the weeds –“all causes of sin and all evildoers” – and the punishment – casting into the furnace of fire. We are pretty perverse about this because we always seem to expect that the plant next to us is the weed and deserves everything he or she gets.

The story is not so much about judgment as it is about who gets to judge and when that judgment will take place. Let me be more to the point. We don't get to judge, because as we stand and grow in the garden we can't – like the sower's servants – tell the wheat from the weeds. I have given up trying to judge members of my different parishes. Just when you are sure you've identified the weed that needs to be plucked, they go and do something so Christ-like it makes you feel like an idiot. I also try not to identify the saints among us. Because just when you think you have Mother Theresa sitting right there in the pews, she goes and does something that dents the halo quite a bit.

We are bad judges – mostly because we are all so much alike. Look around you? Can you identify the wheat and the weeds?

Well – I know some of us think we can, but maybe that weed *you've* identified has his mind on *you* being the one to be plucked out of God's garden. And maybe you are both wrong.

There are people we don't like. People we are quick to criticize and sometimes rightfully so. There are folks among us who are addicts of some sort or another. Some who seem pious to the max who go home and say things that would make a sailor blush. In other words there are a lot of folks doing their level best to mature in the Spirit, who simply fail a time or two or three. That would be you and me.

There may very well be some weeds sitting in the pews, but I can't spot them, and neither can you. There is a time and a place for judgment. And there is a righteous judge to preside over that judgment. But the time isn't now, and we aren't even on the jury, let alone sitting on the throne of judgment.

We need to be especially careful about judging those who don't attend church or belong to another denomination or another faith. It is easy and usually satisfying to judge those folks, but it is wrong – plain and simple.

Perhaps if we are to judge or discern anything about anyone we should start with ourselves.

Have we loved more than not today? Have we said our prayers, and sought mercy for others, and forgiveness for our own shortcomings and weaknesses? Have we prayed that God's kingdom will come quickly? Have we done anything in word or deed to advance the coming of that kingdom? Have we reached out to others in the name of Jesus Christ? Have we invited anyone to be a part of the Body of Christ?

Jesus says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” He doesn’t leave any room in that sentence for judgment on our part. Love one another. That means you are probably going to love some weeds as well as some wheat. But in God’s miraculous kingdom we who are willing to love with great abandon may very well change some weeds into good grain for the harvest including ourselves. We may find that we need to nurture the fertile seed of God’s love that dwells within us, so that we can more readily share that love with those around us.

Let the wheat and the weeds grow together, leave the judging for the harvest. And be thankful that God’s judgment is infinitely more merciful than our mercy. Amen