

Rev. Estelle Margarones, 2/17/19, First Parish York, Matthew 13:24-34

Biblical parables--stories with spiritual lessons—probably got early Christians thinking. They could hear the story, play with it, figure out how it applied to their lives, take meaning from it and be enriched for it. We have that same option of course, but today's world is different.

Today, if we hear or see something we don't understand, rather than wrestling with it, we move on. If it's confusing, we stop listening.

Today's story used to be labeled “the parable of the wheat and the tares”, but it’s usually labeled today as “the parable of wheat and weeds” and that actually gives you a better sense of what it's about.

In the story, a farmer has fields of wheat, but it's found that there are weeds growing up alongside the wheat. Where did they come from? “An enemy planted those bad seeds in the night.” Historically, occurrences of this very thing **did** happen. Lest you think this is too far-fetched, my friend Bob had something similar happen fewer than ten years ago.

Bob lived across the street from me. He had this big, dead tree in his yard and one day I asked him about it. “Oh”, he said, “the guy who used to live next door killed it.” I probed a little more and learned that the leaves from Bob's tree were a hot button issue for his neighbor. They'd get into it from time to time about raking or blowing. I guess the guy made some sort of threat about taking matter into his own hands and Bob was convinced that the other guy had poured antifreeze at the base of the tree.

Going back to the ancient crops, we've had an enemy sabotage the field. There are good seeds and bad seeds growing side by side. The offer is made to weed the plants that aren't wheat. The weed was probably a plant called dandelion which looks like wheat in the early stages. The farmer realizes that if this were to be done, some of the wheat would get uprooted and be lost to him, so he resists and says, “Wait until harvest. I'll separate it then.”

Traditionally, Christians believe that the wheat symbolizes good, upright Christians and the weed is, well, the imposters. Good and bad exist in this world. Even side by side. Christians will be scooped up into God's storehouse and the others will be burned up.

Just for a few seconds, let's flash back to the last couple of Scripture lessons. We were told 'love God and love your neighbor' and 'don't judge'. In light of that, I like to think of the lesson in this passage as **“Just love everyone. God will sort it all out later.”**

There are a few more lessons here. I'm going to apologize to any actual landscapers here today and share a lesson from Lowe's. Remember a few years ago when we had a hot, dry summer? Did you have watering bans here? Did your lawn turn that lovely shade of straw? Mine did. And the next spring, I had 'hay patches' and weeds.

It was going to be expensive to bring in a professional so I set out to learn as much as I could about getting rid of the weeds and growing a new lawn. Armed with all my new knowledge, I headed to Lowe's Home Improvement store. It could be that because I was reading bag after bag of seed and fertilizer and bottle after bottle of weed remedies that I tipped off the guy in the gardening section. (I was no expert!) After hearing my tale of woe, he said, “Don't worry about the weeds, concentrate on the grass. Grow the grass. Take care of it. It will eventually overcome the weeds.” It makes good sense. Concentrate on what you do want, not on what you don't want. Plant the good seeds. Leonardo da Vinci said, “Even the richest soil, if left uncultivated will produce the rankest weeds, so I say to you, cultivate the good. (And, don't water your weeds!)”

Plant the seeds of kindness, hope, and love. Those seeds may be small, but they may have big outcomes.

Jesus talks about planting tiny mustard seeds that yield a grand tree where the birds of the heavens can perch. Birds represent a connection between Heaven and Earth. The holy spirit is represented as a dove. Noah's dove brings back a sign of peace in the olive branch. From the tiny seeds come entities that help span the distance between Heaven and Earth.

Our Bible says that the woman took yeast and mixed it in with flour. In other versions, we're told that a woman hides leaven in with the flour. Leaven is a substance, typically yeast, that is used to make dough rise. Leaven is also defined as a **pervasive influence that modifies something or transforms it for the better.**

In each of the parables Jesus tells in this series, there is something being hidden within something else. Seeds in the soil. Leaven in the flour. In each of the stories,

there's a reaction which leads to exponential transformation—and it's initially imperceptible. **God is at work in the world, whether we see it or not.**

Jesus has been describing the kingdom of heaven. Is Jesus saying it's something that we can grow? Are we to plant and cultivate the good seeds? Are we to act as agents of transformation, allowing something helpful or hopeful to expand? What's the role of faith? Does it cause the chemical reaction?

The man is planting seeds in the first parable. The woman is using leaven to make the bread swell. In both cases, there's growth that neither the man, nor the woman caused. The growth came from God. Are we really talking about seeds and bread...or could it be that we're actually talking about growing the kingdom ourselves?

Taking a kernel of an idea...and sharing it with others...and getting some excitement around it...and causing it to become real...?!

If you've seen *The York Weekly* recently, you may have already seen examples of this happening. Here's the paper from last week. Check this out. Several organizations in York have banded together to provide rides to folks that need them. Different agencies with vehicles are trading off days to make transportation available for seniors and others who may not be able to get around. So they can get to the grocery store or a friend's house. It's a pilot program and, who knows, it could possibly become permanent here...or even launch statewide or nationally! (York Weekly, 2/6/19) By the way, if you want the phone number for this service, it will be in the office.

And next to that is the story of one woman, Kelli Krohn, who is spearheading the push for a dog park in York. She's also on the front page this week and I especially appreciate the first few words of the first sentence of the article, "A spirited group of dog owners.." because I do think the Holy Spirit inspires us. (York Weekly, 2/13/19)

Elsewhere in the paper, there's an article about the Future of Clean Energy in York and it talks about a new citizens' organization that advocates for 100% renewable energy in York by 2030. (A citizens' group.)

But wait, there's more! Maine Audubon will feature a community engagement talk next month. The article says that "Today, gardens, yards, neighborhoods and towns are playing increasingly critical roles in supporting native food webs for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. Our individual efforts to support wildlife can be

both intimately rewarding and broadly beneficial.” (York Weekly, 2/13/19, page B5)

Our individual efforts can be both personally rewarding and deeply beneficial to the greater community. Plant the seed, add the leaven. And watch to see what exciting ways God transforms you....and the world around you—through you. Blessed be and amen.