

The 8th Sunday After Pentecost, July 19, 2026

St. Andrew's Church, Kitchener

Holy Communion/Eucharist, 8:a.m./10:00 a.m.

Revised Common Lectionary(Pr. 16, Yr. A): Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Preacher: Gerry Mueller

Two movies came to mind when working on this sermon. Both in my opinion contain more than necessary violence, but are also serious exploration of good and evil and their relationship. That subject is also at the core of today's Gospel, the *Parable of the Weeds*.

One movie is **Seven**. Two detectives, an old hand and a young officer too full of himself, are investigating several murders. It appears the killer is working through the seven deadly sins as themes. Pride, greed, lust, gluttony, and sloth each claim a victim. The murderer is captured, seemingly stopping him from acting on envy and anger as the final two sins. The killer makes it clear that envy **has** claimed a victim; he envies the young detective his normal, happy life, and has killed his young, pregnant wife. The death symbolic of anger will be his own, as he goads the detective into shooting him, what's labelled "suicide by cop". The older officer begs his colleague not to give in to rage; if he kills the murderer he will be no better than him. But anger wins, the killer is killed, the upholder of the law becomes a criminal.

The second movie is **Dead Man Walking**. A nun, Sister Helen Prejean (a real person), becomes involved in the case of a young man, Matthew Poncelet (a composite character), awaiting execution for rape and the murder of a young couple. Clearly Poncelet contacted the nun only because she might get him clemency. He is

manipulative, and thoroughly despicable. Nevertheless, despite her instincts, Sister Helen maintains contact, because of Jesus' command to love, especially love the unlovable. No matter his crimes, Poncelet is still a child of God, and as such, better than the worst thing he did. When, despite last-ditch legal efforts, Poncelet is to be executed, he asks Sister Helen to be his spiritual advisor in his last hours. She accepts, so she can bring to him the unconditional love of Jesus, who loves Poncelet despite everything he has done. But, like Jesus, her love is not weak nor wishy-washy. She confronts Poncelet, urging him to accept and acknowledge his terrible crimes, if he is to die with dignity. She accompanies him on his final walk. In his last minutes, he confesses his guilt, asks pardon of the parents of his victims, and dies with his last sight being Sister Helen looking at him with, in her words, the face of love. If we **believe** our theology, he dies a **forgiven** sinner!

But, **but(!)**, you are likely asking now, what do these movies have to do with this parable about sowing wheat, and an enemy sowing weeds?

The parable of the weeds is one of a sequence which started last Sunday and will go on next Sunday, collectively called *Parables of*

*the Kingdom*¹. In each one Jesus says the equivalent of, ... *again, the kingdom of heaven is like ...*, and then tells a story. Obviously, Jesus is exploring the kingdom of heaven from different angles, with different analogies.

And so, the kingdom of heaven is like a farmer sowing wheat, and, while waiting for it to grow, someone else sows weeds among the wheat. Specifically, from the Greek text, the weeds are darnel, a grass that looks very much like wheat, especially in its early growth. The hired hands discover the weeds growing profusely, wonder where they came from, and the farmer explains the weeds were planted by an enemy. The hired hands want to do the obvious; pull up all the weeds. The farmer however notes that in doing that, they are likely to pull up some wheat as well, since they look so much alike. At harvest time, it will be easy to distinguish wheat from weeds; then will be the time to gather the weeds to be burned, and the wheat to be put into the barn.

In explanation, Jesus parallels the sower with himself, the field with the world, and the wheat as the children of the kingdom of heaven; the weeds are children of the evil one, sowed by the devil; the harvest is the end of time. It all seems obvious, but there are some fascinating **details** hidden in the words used by Jesus.

Seed usually means what is sown, but in his interpretation Jesus

¹ This discussion of the parable relies substantially on the book **Parables of the Kingdom** by John Farrar Capon; Zondervan Books, 1985

uses *seed* to mean what has grown, the children of the kingdom. In the New Testament the Greek word for seed is used more than 40 times, only four times does it mean what is planted; almost always it means what is growing, what we'd call seedlings. Combined with the meaning that Jesus gives to the field, the whole **world**, we see the universality and catholicity of the kingdom of heaven. Sown into all the world, meaning all places and all times, there is **no** place, and **no** time, in which the kingdom is not already **growing**.

Something goes wrong while all are sleeping. Why ***sleeping***? Jesus is not complaining of workers napping on the job. Simply, wheat, once sown, grows; there is no **need** to **watch**. All things being equal, seed grows entirely on its own. Similarly, the kingdom, once planted, grows; there is no need for extraordinary vigilance or work on anyone's part. Of course, the weeds are also sown while everyone is asleep. But note, the weeds in no way **interfere** with the wheat. Not **danger** to the wheat, but **inconvenience** to the farmer and hired hands is the agricultural dilemma. The helpers, naturally, have intense feelings about that inconvenience, and want to take immediate direct action. The farmer though has a grander strategy; not fighting a battle against **temporary** inconvenience, but waiting and winning the war, **once and for all**. Doing nothing, for the time, until the harvest - the end of time - is the better strategy. Doing something - pulling up the weeds - is more of a menace than the weeds.

The message seems to be that programs to rid the world of evil, are, by the muddle-headedness of the world and the craftiness of the enemy, doomed to failure. Those who want to do the ridding, the pulling-up of the weeds, can't tell the real difference between good and evil. All they accomplish with efforts to rid the world of evil, is ridding it of at least some good as well. Worse, since good and evil inhabit not only the same field, but even the same individual humans - there are no more totally bad guys than there are totally good guys - efforts to rid ourselves of evil attack ourselves!

That puts the finger on the enemy's purpose in sowing weeds. He has no power over good; the wheat grows - the kingdom is in the world - nothing he can do about it. But if he can sucker the forces for good into taking up arms against evil, havoc will result. Unable to act, without power to oppose the growth of the kingdom, simply by spreading around a generous helping of darkness the enemy can wait for the children of light to do his dirty deeds. Goodness, if sufficiently **committed** to rooting out evil, will in the very name of goodness do all and more than evil could ever accomplish!

This is one point from the two movies with which I began. In *Seven*, the force of good, the young detective, in the end proves equal to the evil he is working to suppress. By making it his mission, his obsession, to stop the evil murderer, in the end he **becomes** that

which he wants to uproot, a murderer. Wheat becomes weed. And at the end of *Dead Man Walking*, after showing himself responsible for his actions, and capable of redemption, we are not **entirely** sure that the one executed, uprooted, was indeed a weed, rather than wheat.

If by now you are worrying that this sermon is making a case for pacifism, or non-resistance, or against capital punishment, **continue** to worry! But also, make a **distinction**! The parable does not say that resistance to evil is morally **wrong**, only that it will not **work** well. You can therefore continue to make the case for just wars, active aggression against evil, wars against terror, locking up criminals and throwing away the key, deportation of illegal migrants, capital punishment, or any other sensible, morally right-thinking solution to the problem of the presence of malefactors on earth. Just **don't** assume they will make the world a **better** place! You may take the sword, but remember that those who do, perish by the sword. God does not punish people for going to war; war is its own punishment. God will not get us for brutally going after criminals, or even executing them, our punishment is the increasing brutalisation of **all** our society.

What then is the answer to the problem of evil? Unfortunately, the only answer from Scripture is that of the farmer: *An enemy has done this*. You may not like it, but **that** is **it**. Then there are only two other important questions. The first is, "Whose side are you on?"

With God, or with the enemy?" And the second is, "Whose methods do you use in dealing with the problem?" God's answer seems to be; pull up evil, and you'll pull up goodness right along with it. And the devil says; right on, keep pulling!

The farmer - God - says, ***let** both of them grow together until the harvest*. That word **let** hides more fascinating treasure. The Greek word it translates is also translated (about 1/3 of the time) as **forgive**. Two notable places; in the Lord's Prayer, ... *forgive (let) our sins, as we forgive (let) those who sin against us ...*, and Jesus on the cross, ... *forgive (let) them, they don't know what they are doing ...* Let - permit - leave alone - forgive - are similar concepts in the language of the New Testament!

If we take that seriously, the answer to evil might just be **forgiveness**! That is also the message of the life and ministry of Jesus. No enemy, no devil, not me nor you, no one is going to automatically **get it** in the neck in **this** life for evil they might do, at least not from God - well-meaning humans hell-bent (I use the word deliberately) on righteousness are something else! God seems to be able to live with the existence of evil, and wait for the harvest; perhaps we too should get out of the righteousness business, and leave it to the only true expert on good and evil around, the **One** who will take care of all that when the harvest comes.

Again, our only part in this is to decide whose side we are on, and whose methods we will use. The kingdom will flourish quite nicely without our helping it along, thank you very much. If we just accepted that, life would be **so much simpler!**

Some seeds - **planted** for your summer reflection!