

Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

July 23, 2023

This morning I'd like to introduce you to a strange fellow.

It's October 1st, 1788, in Edinburgh Scotland and we notice a well-dressed man who is a respectable cabinet maker, member of a trade's guild and city counsellor.

His name is Deacon William Brodie.

Yet, at night, this same man transforms into a burglar, ransacking homes to fuel a gambling addiction.

Unfortunately for Brodie, today is different, because today, in the Grassmarket he is found guilty and hung with the largest crowd in Scottish history witnessing his downfall.

He confidently strides to the gallows still dressed in his Sunday best, confidently adjusts his wig, and walks off the plank.

Some of you here today might never have heard of Deacon Brodie, and yet you probably know him by another name.

You see, he was the inspiration behind the book "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

Throughout centuries imposters have existed. Sometimes people have pretended to be someone else to do amazing things.

Women who penned under a man's name to get their work published,
or detectives who pretend to be criminals to catch the bad guys, for example.

Yet, more often, imposters cause irreversible damage through scams, fraud, hacking or worse.

Today's Gospel lesson is also about imposters –
except Jesus illustrates his point using plants.

A farmer went out to sow seeds in his field.

Yet, overnight, an enemy comes in and sows weeds among it.

When the farmer discovers what has happened, the servants offer to yank all the weeds up which would have been a common reaction to what has transpired.

But the farmer reluctantly disagrees knowing that the roots of the weed and the wheat have been intertwined and so damage will be done by rooting them out impulsively.

Instead, the farmer tells the workers to wait until the harvest when the difference will be more noticeable.

Ancient Israel was an Agrarian society, so the disciples would have known the deeper issue Jesus was presenting.

You see, it wasn't just about the weeds,

it was about the malicious enemy who wanted to destroy the farmer's crop.

Back then, this was a common way to seek revenge or to engage in rivalry. Actually, the enemy had nothing to gain from sowing the weed, except the satisfaction of knowing that he sabotaged his neighbour.

The enemy came in the middle of the night when no one was around to stop him.

He then sowed a common invasive species which the Bible often describes as tares, but today we know as Bearded Darnell or Ryegrass.

Darnell seeds were known as “Wheat’s Evil Twin” because they looked so similar.

Yet, their seeds germinated quickly, causing rapid growth and overtaking the field. Their seeds were also stowaways – requiring harvesting alongside domesticated grasses in hopes that they would accidentally be replanted the next season.

Truthfully, they were not even a grass, but a fungus.

While darnel looked the same as wheat, if one ate it the results would be drastically different.

People complained about dizziness, feeling off-balance, or nauseous similar to being drunk or high.

Even a trace amount of the darnel would ruin the batch of flour – sometimes even causing death to those who accidentally ate bread mixed with it.

There was only one difference between the darnel and the wheat plants which wasn’t obvious until harvesting.

And that was that the wheat ears were heavy and drooped, but the darnel ears stood straight up.

So knowing that the workers lacked the insight to tell the difference immediately, they were instructed to wait until the harvest when it would be separated out and the darnel would be burned in the fire.

Jesus was telling his disciples and us that we do not get to weed His garden for Him.

We don’t get to decide who is in and who is out.

It’s easy to go into a weeding frenzy –

mostly because of passion and conviction that this truly is the right path, but by choosing who is truly a disciple and who isn’t, we are pretending to play God.

Just because someone lives differently that we do, does not mean they are no longer a child of God.

Just because someone lives the way we think they should, doesn’t mean they are.

After all, Jesus said that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will actually be accepted by God in Heaven.

We may meet those who seem to be on the same path as we are,
 they may say all the right words, and do all the right actions,
 but eventually their heart is exposed.
 These same people pretend to want to promote the Kingdom,
 but what they are actually doing is sowing seeds of disruption and discord.

These are the kinds of people Jesus warns us about.

These are the darnels that grow up among the wheat.
 These agents act like malware, getting into a computer and destroying its system.

And yet, we do not always know right away which one is which so we have to exercise good caution and judgement.

John Newton once said, "if I ever get to heaven I expect to find three wonders there.

First, to meet some I had not thought to see there.
 Second, to miss some I had expected to see there.
 And third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there."

The second lesson that Jesus teaches us through this parable is to be patient.

The farmer allowed the wheat and weeds to grow up together.
 The darnel itself was not a threat to the wheat even though some might have thought it was.
 Rather, the trouble was in the way that the wheat responded to the weed.

In our lives it is impossible to avoid sin and destruction around us.

Wars will happen,
 hatred and violence will happen,
 prejudice and judgementalism will happen.

We live in a world that is at odds with the ways of God.

We cannot avoid being part of the world by trying to rid the world of everything we consider evil.
 And yet, we can choose to still grow strong despite what is around us.

Philippians reminds us that we are to shine like stars in a crooked and depraved world.

And Romans teaches us to be in the world, but not of the world.

It can be easy for us who consider ourselves wheat to give our sole attention to weeding out the garden,
 but we have to be patient and let God do the work.
 God asks for us to trust, rather than taking matters into our own hands.

When we are tempted to call out another's actions and tell them about the speck in their eye,
we can practice patience and remember that God is working in their brokenness.

When we are tempted to judge another's choices,
we can practice showing patience by believing that God still loves, forgives, and redeems.

When we are tempted to give up praying for a family member who shows no interest in God's ways,
we can patiently believe that God is going to break into their lives and speak to them.

We might even need to learn to be gentler and patient with ourselves.

If we are tempted to berate ourselves, we can remember that we are still a work in progress.

And God is not done with us yet.

This week, may we remember and trust the Good Gardener to take care of the weeds and leave us to enjoy the beautiful flowers.

Be blessed this week.

Amen.