

## Look Again

Maybe after hearing today's parable you think I'm all wet to say that the parables are mysterious and hard to understand.

That the meaning is hidden.

That getting it requires us to develop Kingdom eyes and Kingdom ears.

After all, isn't this story of the weeds and the wheat as clear as day, using just everyday eyes and everyday ears?

Of course the world is divided up between good guys and bad guys!

When Jesus explains the parable, why, it seems pretty cut and dry.

Good and bad live side by side.

But someday, God will show up and reward the good and punish the bad.

Simple enough!

So please, Fr. David, stop making things more complicated than they actually are.

No such luck!

Because despite what appears to be obvious in today's parable, in fact, Jesus is inviting us to take a closer look.

Remember, this is the same Jesus who says, like, 10 minutes ago:

“I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” Mt 13:13.

So maybe it's a safe bet that what seems crystal clear may not be so obvious after all.

And the first clue comes with the weeds he's talking about.

Jesus isn't talking dandelions.

If you love the King James Bible, you'll remember this as the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

Tares being an old English word for “Cheat Wheat.”

It's a weed that looks just like wheat.

Only when it's ripe and ready for harvest does it show itself for the weed that it is.

While the wheat kernels become flour for nourishment, the tare kernels can cause hallucinations — and even death.

And there's something else about these particular weeds.

Tares grow in and around the wheat; so that weeds and wheat are intertwined, particularly at the roots, the place from which they receive life and nourishment.

Which is already a warning flag that this parable may not be as simple as it seems.

Rather than a world where we have the good over here and bad over there; Jesus says that good and bad are woven together, even to the very root.

Something that Jesus proves on a daily basis!

Just look at who he surrounds himself with.

Like that Rock, St. Peter himself!

One minute he sees in Jesus the promised Messiah.

And yet moments later he's at the end of Jesus' accusing finger!

"You Satan, get behind me!"

Because Peter is outraged that Messiah must suffer and die.

And what about the rest of that motley crew?

There's James and John who, in a heartbeat, leave everything to follow Jesus.

Yet there they are, shamelessly lobbying for seats of glory, as Jesus heads towards his crucifixion.

The rest are no different.

They follow him through thick and thin, until the thin gets too scary, and all but the women run away, hiding in terror.

Jesus, not only in his parables, but with his whole ministry, invites us to see that we are none of us purely good and we none of us are purely bad.

We, individually and collectively, are that mixture of wheat and weeds, right down to our roots.

Those good seeds were indeed sown right at the beginning.

Back when God's creation was new.

A creation that was not only good, but very good indeed.

Those good seeds were invaded by bad seeds, also right at the beginning, when we decided to take for ourselves the power to say what is good and who is evil.

That fateful day in the garden, which we reenact every single day, when we eat what God says to leave alone.

God offers us wheat, but we love the nightmares and hallucinations of the tares.

And so we have our wars.

Between spouses and siblings.

And neighbors and nations.

All caused by competing claims of who is right and what is wrong.

Today, Jesus reminds us yet again that we aren't meant to make those judgments.

And when the circumstances of this broken world compel us to make the call, can we at least do so with the full knowledge that even our best and most considered judgments — may be completely wrong?

Because whatever good roots we have, they are always entwined with the bad.

Perhaps you are still objecting to my take on the parable.

After all, when Jesus explains it, he talks about how, at the end of the age,

“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Which, to our Everyday eyes and ears sounds like the good being rewarded and the bad punished.

But even that may not be as it seems.

Think about how God enters our lives.

It's never with power or coercion.

It's always about submitting to our oh so human love of violence.

God incarnate is dismissed.

Ridiculed.

Arrested.

Tortured.

Then, killed on one of the most heinous devices human depravity has ever invented.

Rather than fight back, he forgives.

Rather than condemn, he embraces.

So what about this line?

“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Does it perhaps mean something other than the obvious?

What if it's not the angels throwing the evildoers into the fire – but rather the “evildoers” who throw the angels “into the furnace of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth?”

Sounds crazy, I know!

But what's even crazier is our insistence that the God who comes to us as a suffering servant will someday return as a gun-toting Rambo.

Doesn't the way of Jesus point to, even demand, that at the end of the age, the angels will not only refuse to inflict violence, but instead will submit to it, just like Jesus?

Can it be that it's not God who's in love with sacrifice and just desserts, but us?

Maybe that's why St. Paul can shout with amazement that while we are still sinners, God sends Jesus to save us.

Why Paul can correctly see that there's not one of us who is blameless, as God takes on flesh, submits to the worst we can do, and forgives us.

Remember the scene from the Book of Revelation, where the question is asked by St. John concerning a vast multitude clothed in white robes:

"Who are they, and where have they come from?"

And he said to me,

"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev 7:13.

As much as we secretly long for the day when God will give all the bad guys that final knockout punch, what Jesus keeps reminding us is that at the end of the day, to our very roots, we are all a profound mix of bad and good.

While we so often crave bloody sacrifice; God gives mercy.

Which is why Jesus tells us, quoting the prophet:

“Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'”

If we can keep that truth squarely in front of us, we might come to see that the first lesson of kingdom living is NOT looking forward to the day when scores will be settled, but to reflect deeply on our own need for repentance.

And so instead of offering us a black and white picture about good folks and bad, perhaps today's parable is a reminder that when I point my finger at you, I've got three more pointing back at me.

“Let anyone with kingdom ears, listen!”

+amen