

PENTECOST: A TIME TO BE FILLED WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 11

July 20, 2008

Isaiah 44:6-8

(or Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19)

Psalms 86:11-17

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Don't Pull Out Those Weeds Just Yet!

Reassuring words of comfort from our Lord Jesus – isn't that what we anticipate hearing each week from the assigned Gospel text? But every now and then we get a text that has what we can be referred to as the "hard sayings" of Jesus. And this week is one of those times. To be sure, hearing about who will be judged and thrown into a furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth is not an image that strikes a particularly comforting tone. But the Gospel is good news, is it not?

This week's Gospel text, from the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, is one of seven parables within this chapter that illustrates Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven. The parable about weeds among wheat or, as it is sometimes known, the parable of the wheat and the tares, causes us to pause and consider: What are we to learn from this parable?

Yes, wheat and weeds can co-exist. Even though the Son of Man sowed good seed, the evil one has sown that which is not good. Thus, the wheat, in order to co-exist with the weeds, must endure pain and suffering. A familiar hymn by Henry Alford (1810-1887), often sung at Thanksgiving time, includes these words: "Wheat and tares together sown, Unto joy or sorrow grown." Daily news reports affirm the prevalence of evil in our world. We cry out, "God, do something! Stop this evil! Pull out those weeds!" And, if we're honest, don't we, at times, seek to take matters into our own hands and engage in weed pulling ourselves?

But Jesus, in this parable, reminds us that pulling out the weeds is a task reserved for God's angels at harvest time. Couched in apocalyptic imagery, the parable speaks of a harvest, a metaphor frequently used to refer to the final judgment (see Matthew 3:12; Revelation 4:14-20). If we attempt to do what is reserved for God, there is the danger that we will uproot the wheat along with the weeds since the roots of both are intertwined (verse 29).

Have we ever choked someone's spirit with an unkind word, or allowed ourselves to participate in some malicious, hurtful gossip? If we think long and hard, it is very likely that we can identify moments in our lives when we've not been life-sustaining wheat but

rather an unlovely weed. Both wheat and weed grow within us, and it is not up to us to judge who among us is wheat or weed.

Thankfully, our God is merciful and loving, “always patient, always kind and faithful” (Psalm 86:15b, *GNT*). When we are weeds, we are grateful not to be pulled up right away. God is giving us time, from now until the final harvest, to change our ways. The writer of 2 Peter puts it this way: “The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised ... he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins” (3:9, *GNT*).

As a parable about the kingdom of heaven, we learn that this week’s Gospel text depicts the cosmic dimensions of God’s purposes. We live in a world where justice and injustice co-exist. But we are assured that, in the final judgment, evil will be defeated and God’s righteousness will prevail. When we pray, “Your kingdom come; your will be done” (Matthew 6:10), we agree not only to work alongside and to pray for those who work to extend God’s kingdom but also, as instructed by Jesus, to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

In the explanation Jesus gives of the parable, we see the earthly Jesus who sows the good seed (verse 37) as well as the apocalyptic Jesus who instructs his angels at the close of the age to do the harvesting (verse 41). Evil will be routed and “God’s people will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom” (verse 43a, *GNT*).

We are called to live now as those “who are led by God’s Spirit” (Romans 8:14a, *GNT*). And, as we await the future glory described by the apostle Paul in this week’s epistle from Romans, we are assured that “we will possess the blessings [God] keeps for his people” (8:17a, *GNT*).

What are we to learn from the parable? Jesus tells us in his interpretation of the parable and admonishes us with these closing words: “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Russian Federation – With prayers for the success of projects such as *Scripture Resources for Public School Teachers*, *Bible for Sunday School Teachers*, and *Bible for the Russian Military*, and with prayers for spiritual revival in the country, and with thanks to God for the favorable court decision concerning Bible House in Moscow; **Kazakhstan** – With thanks to God for the publication of trial editions of Ruth, Jonah, and 1 Thessalonians, and for Scripture distribution in prisons and children’s summer camps and orphanages, and with prayers for the Kazakh Study Bible project, for the establishment of a Bible Museum in Aktobe, and for economic and political stability in the Kyrgyz Republic; **Uzbekistan** – With thanks to God for answered prayer, and with prayers for the ongoing project to translate the Old Testament in Uzbek and for work on Uzbek audio Scriptures,

and with prayers for God's blessing on Scripture distribution activities and Bible work in Turkmenistan.

Activity Corner: "Listen Up" Prayers

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper (assorted colors); pattern in the shape of an ear (approximately 5" x 3"); pens/pencils; scissors.

Read together Psalm 86:11-17. At the end of the reading, invite everyone to respond together, "TEACH ME YOUR WAY, O LORD." Invite members of your household to trace and cut out "ears." On one side of each ear, copy Psalm 86:11a or the words "Teach me your way, O LORD." On the reverse side of one ear, ask each one to list a behavioral "weed" in their lives that they need God's help in overcoming; on the reverse side of the other ear, ask each one to think about a way they can be "wheat" and to write a prayer of thanks to God for an opportunity to be of service to others.