

Sermon July 20, 2014

Caleb Yoder, Joint service of the Quito, Jardines del Inca and Calderón Mennonite churches.

Topic: "Distinguishing between the weeds and the wheat"

Texts: Isaiah 44:6-8, Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

We all know that Jesus spoke a lot in parables. Parables are comparisons or stories that teach something about the kingdom of God, but they do not speak in a very direct way. We have to interpret them and it is not always easy. In the passage we read, Jesus' disciples, who were never good at interpreting parables, ask Jesus directly for the explanation. So this morning we want to examine this this parable to see what it can tell us about the kingdom of God and the call we have from Jesus.

The problem is that Jesus told this parable to people from the country and here we are in a big city. Nicholas and Victoria could help us with their experiences if they were here. I imagine very few of us have worked in wheat fields. But if we've ever grown something, we know you always have to pull them up as soon as possible because it prevents the growth of crops.

In the parable, there is a wheat field, but the workers see another plant growing as well: the weeds. It wasn't the wind that got it there, rather it was sown by an enemy of the owner.

What weed are we talking about? To understand a little better the parable is necessary to understand that the weed in question, is probably darnel, a plant quite similar to wheat that proliferated in Israel. They are so alike that it is almost impossible to tell the difference until the ears of the plants appear. The ears of wheat are heavier and are whiter. At the time of harvest it is clear which are wheat and which are darnel.

In addition, the grains of darnel are poisonous if eaten. So to avoid it reproducing the plant has to be burned. But despite the presence of the darnel, the owner anticipates such a bumper crop of wheat that it will be necessary to store it in the barn.

With any parable, there is something that conflicts with real life. Why let the weeds go so long? Is it that difficult for the workers to identify them? What would it matter if some wheat were lost?

Like all parables, Jesus tells it so that people will reflect on the kingdom of God, but he gives no explanation. Sometimes parables have more than one explanation. In this case, the closest disciples did not understand and ask for the explanation, an explanation that will continue to encourage the early Christian communities after the ministry of Jesus.

In this explanation, Jesus himself sowed the good seed to grow wheat. The wheat includes people who follow Jesus, orienting their lives to the rhythm of the kingdom of God, and not to the kingdoms and empires of this world. But the wheat lives among weeds. In this world there is oppression, violence, consumerism, infidelity, and other forces of death. Too many people live according to the logic of these forces and not according to the logic of the kingdom of God.

So the church does not have a tranquil existence, but finds many challenges on its way. Its witness clashes with everything that society takes for granted. In the kingdom of this world, for example, it does not make sense to love one's enemy.

The servants asked, "do you want us to go out and pull up the weeds?" Is not it obvious who the bad people are in this world? Had not Jesus himself said that "by their fruits ye shall know them"? It seems that this parable serves to nuance that other teaching. We can easily identify evil actions. They are obvious: all the atrocities committed in wartime. So many innocent people who receive death threats. And so many women suffer abuse by their partners. And our actions must resist these bad actions in any way we can. But it is not so easy to simply divide the world into good and bad. So the Lord answered them, "No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them." This could be interpreted as a warning to us to not be the judges. How do we know how to perfectly distinguish between the weeds and the wheat? The gospel message is that the life of Jesus can transform people, even people who commit evil.

The message that the parable gives us is one of non-violence. We should not be surprised by the evil that exists in the world, and it is not our task to try to weed out those who are bad, repeating the cycle of violence where victims become victimizers. We might judge wrongly, harm a brother or sister, or a future brother or sister. We commit the very same evil and violent acts in our anxiousness to eliminate evil.

Are we totally wheat or also weeds in part? We know there are few people who are completely bad. Most are a mixture of wheat and weeds. For this reason, there are so many not-so-bad people who are carried along by the systems of death and destruction in the world.

Of course I understand that sometimes you can't trust people, even as a Christian. If you know someone is a paramilitary, you are obviously going to be careful with that person. But still, we do not know everything that person has in his or her heart - including the wounds or fears that have taken him or her down wrong paths.

In the church we want to see a visible difference, and offer a different life to the children that will be dedicated today. But we know we are not perfect, that we still lack transformation in order to be like Christ. Sometimes our actions and attitudes communicate something else that is not the message of Jesus.

Do we always produce good fruit? Do we have peace within ourselves and in our homes? What do we do to resist evil? Those are questions for personal reflection.

When we read the Gospel passage this morning, we skipped the part where Jesus tells the parable of the mustard seed. The mustard seed is tiny but produces a large shrub two meters high.

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the evil and suffering in the world, things that simply should not happen. These lessons of Jesus' encourage us when we wonder: Where is the kingdom of God? Why is it not easy to see? The parables claim that God's kingdom is growing and will become large, even if it sometimes passes unnoticed amid the weeds.

The fate of those who persist in doing evil and full redemption of our human pilgrimage are in God's hands. We trust that one day everything will come to light. We trust that the day will come when all offenders will understand what they have done, and to the extent they are human, it will grieve them.

God is with us in the ambiguity and uncertainty of life. God reminds us that we are his children. God guides our steps before the choices we must make, whether what to study or what work to do, how we form families, or when we must migrate. God gives us the

energy to act, but we rest in knowing that the coming of the kingdom is in God's hands.

I leave you with three conclusions:

- We each must evaluate our own fruit.
- We must trust that things are in the hands of God who will bring everything to light.
- We must work for justice without employing violence or revenge. We continue to believe in the possibilities of each person to change.