

Gloria Dei Meditation July 23, 2017

Isaiah 44:6-8

Psalms 86:11-17

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The driver ahead of her and not proceeded fast enough in following the traffic and was stopped by the red light. The woman was irate and honked her horn in dissatisfaction, even rolling down her window and extending her fist with a series of gestures at the driver. The light turned, the traffic moved forward, the woman looked in her rear view mirror and saw the red and blue light flashing atop the police car. She pulled over, lowered her window as the officer approached the car. "I will need to see your license and insurance please, mam," said the officer. "Officer, why did you stop me?" she asked. "Well, mam, I read your bumper sticker that said 'Honk If You Love Jesus' and I just assumed you were driving a stolen car." Sometimes it is difficult to pass judgment.

The man was in a hurry on the highway in eastern Pennsylvania. Traffic lanes were diminishing in number. The 18-year-old woman pulled ahead of him in her lane. She went where he had wanted to go. He pulled a gun and shot her, her car careening into a ravine and he took what he had assumed was his rightful place in traffic.

It is an age-old question: why is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds Jesus suggests that both grow together until the harvest. From our epistle passage from Romans, with Paul, we long for the day that all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. But until that day, we have 26-hour-per-day media coverage that lets us know how evil the world is, lets us know of its depravity, its hate, its cruel nature. It is not left to us to hope for some vague Christian karma to right the wrongs.

So we turn to today's gospel passage where Jesus tells a story about a man sowing good seed in his soil. Perhaps certified by Monsanto. But while everyone else is sleeping, the enemy comes and sows the field with darnel, a Eurasian rye grass, tares. The seeds germinated and among the wheat the taller rye grass was seen. The workers came and asked, "Did you not plant certified seed? Did somebody foist off on you the remains of several crops? Do you want us to take care of this?" "No, you might damage the wheat," the land owner said. "At harvest time, we will pull the darnel first, bundle it and burn it. Everything will work out." And later, to his disciples, Jesus explained that God in the end time will take care of the harvest.

Contemporary English-language Bibles cleverly translate this parable with nouns that sound nearly identical: wheat and weeds. It is easy to think of the other as a weed. But Christian theology reminds us that each one of us is both wheat and weed. In Martin Luther's language, we are always both saint and sinner. As in the opening story, our bumper stickers and our practice of life don't always intersect.

In explaining this parable Matthew has Jesus referring to the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Suggesting that the image of eternal separation from God as fire, Gehenna, recalled the perpetually burning garbage heap outside of the walls of ancient Jerusalem. Thus God's judgmental fire was about expulsion from the community and destruction of what is worthless. That this fire is an image is made clear in that people are gnashing their teeth and their bodies have not been destroyed.

Today's gospel reading describes describes God's final judgment of humanity. One reading of this could be that not only are we as individuals both wheat and weeds, the church is a mixed body, made up of good and bad, a situation that will only be resolved at the final judgment. I used to tell people joining the churches I served that if they thought they were joining a perfect church they were in for some serious disappointments/

Though the parable suggest judgment, it also affirms that judgment does not belong to humanity

but to God, who will separate the wheat and the weeds at the end of time. It is easy for communities to identify people who are not like us. In our current political climate, people with whom we disagree are often not encountered in any real way, but are labeled as “evil,” thereby shutting down any possibilities for understanding and growth in community. My deceased father was never a man who used profanity, but occasionally he would have an encounter in life where he would pause and quietly say, “Well, if this isn't a mell of a hess.” Undoubtedly he would be saying that about the level of civil discourse in our political life.

This past weekend we enjoyed the presence of a retired clergy from the British Methodist Church and his spouse and child. They live in Colchester, about 60 miles northeast of London. In the past several months they have shared several meals with Muslims who live in their community. There is a clearing house managed by the church to provide information, so people may know one another as fellow citizens in the United Kingdom.

So, having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly must place our hope in the promises of God. We keep coming to this table. We keep hoping that here we will receive that which will enable us to go forth to bear the fruit of mercy and justice. Paul reminds us that we are saved in hope. We are captives of hope. Since we have not seen salvation for the creation which groans for deliverance, since evil has not been overcome, then we must trust in God and nothing else. We must trust and dream that the great arc of history and the love of God which we see in our Savior Jesus Christ leans toward the truth and the good and the just and the merciful. Might it be so.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen