

angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers,

It is harvest time. Jesus is now the Judge. The command is given and the action begins. He sends his angels and his decree is carried out. This is the judgment that will follow the Son of Man's return at the end of the age when he comes to establish his kingdom in its fully realized form. The weeds are pulled up and burned. Everything that causes sin and everyone who does evil are weeded out of the kingdom and thrown into the fiery furnace. This is the fate of the children of the evil one. What a contrast; **the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.**

These righteous people, once the light of the world, now radiate perfections and experience bliss in the consummation of their hopes.

In 1903 the Russian czar noticed a sentry posted for no apparent reason on the Kremlin grounds. Upon inquiry, he discovered that in 1776 Catherine the Great found there the first flower of spring. "Post a sentry here," she commanded, "so that no one tramples that flower under foot!" The command was obeyed.

He has sounded forth the trumpet
that shall never call retreat
He is sifting out the hearts of men
before his judgment seat. (Julia Ward Howe)

The penalty of the wicked is not God's punishment so much as the consequence of defying the moral order which God, in his love, established.

CONCLUSION

The weeds and the wheat grow together just as the good and the bad live side by side in the world. Jesus' story reinforces our own experience. Something else is also just as true just as certain. The harvest will come and on that day the Son of Man as Judge of all will

give his angels charge at last,
in the fire the weeds to cast
but the fruitful ears to store
in his care for evermore. (Henry Alford)

WHEAT AND WEEDS Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

INTRODUCTION

The Monday Afternoon Club, an organization of city women, met and decided that this month's outing was to be at a dairy farm. Most of them had lived in the city all their lives, and had never seen such a place. The day came for the trip, and the ladies filed into the rented bus which whisked them off to their destination. After they arrived, they were greeted by the farmer who invited them to look him up should they have any questions. Myrtle, after looking about, and being amazed by what she saw, stepped into a building and viewed something she thought was quite remarkable. She saw the farmer walk by and hailed him. "Sir," she inquired, "Why doesn't this cow have any horns?" The farmer cocked his head for a moment, then began in a patient tone: "Well, ma'am, cattle can do a powerful lot of damage with horns. Sometimes we keep'em trimmed down with a hacksaw. Other times we can fix up the young'uns by puttin' a couple drops of acid where their horns would grow in, and that stops 'em growing. Still, there are some breeds of cattle that never grow horns. But the reason this cow don't have no horns, ma'am, is 'cause it's a horse."

Jesus' story of the weeds and the wheat has been used as a warning that the church should not be too exclusive or quick to excommunicate. In any church there will be those who are fully committed and those who are only nominal Christians. But the parable is not about the church. Jesus clearly says, **the field is the world.** Just as the situation of weeds being found growing among the wheat in a farmer's field, so the story reflects the reality of our situation. We live in the world. We do not live in an exclusive Christian society. We live side by side with other Christians, with those of other faiths and with those of no faith. There are good people and bad people. **The field is the world.**

DIABOLICAL DEED

We sometimes blame the devil for our own wrong-doing. *The devil made me do it!* This is rather like the workman who has broken something saying to his boss, "It came off in my hand, guv'nor!" There are times when we have to take responsibility for our actions. The Bible is quite clear that the devil is at work, tempting, influencing, leading astray when he can. Judas betrayed Jesus because the devil had put it into his heart. In farming story about seed being sown Jesus tells how an enemy of the farmer came and sowed weeds among the wheat. He did it while the farmer was asleep. Here is an enemy who is stealthy and malicious. Clearly, Jesus is warning us that there is always a hostile power at work in the world, seeking to destroy that which is

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good. He still works stealthily and maliciously. He persuaded Adam and Eve that God was too strict and there would be no consequences to their disobedience. When he tempted Jesus he waited until Jesus was hungry then said he could turn stones into bread.

Two boys were walking home from church and sharing their reflections on the lesson. They had been studying the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Little Peter said to his friend John, “Do you believe that stuff about the Devil? Do you think there really is a Devil?” John looked at him and said, “Naah, it’s just like Santa Claus—it’s your dad.”

The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.

An evil soul, producing holy witness,

Is like a villain with a smiling cheek;

A goodly apple rotten at the heart.

Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath.

(Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, Act III)

DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH

The enemy sowed weeds among the good seed. It was bearded darnel which, botanically, is very close to wheat. When the plants are young it is very difficult to distinguish between them. The roots of the two plants entwine, but it is only when the heads of grain begin to appear on the wheat that the two can be distinguished. The enemy was very thorough and sowed the weed all over the field. Jesus explained that the field in the story is the world in which we live. The world has wonderful and beautiful places. It also has its dark alleys. Justice and injustice go side by side. In the world are good people and bad people. It is often hard to distinguish. There are those who appear kind and helpful, but they have ulterior motives. Pedophiles put out false information on the internet. They lie about their age and their appearance. They give the impression they want to be friends. All the time they are luring children into a trap. But think of the good devoted teachers who devote their lives to educating children, giving them the benefit of their wisdom and knowledge and really caring about those in their charge.

An old lady had no money to buy food. She prayed, “Dear Lord, please send me a side of bacon and a sack of corn meal.” Over and over again she prayed. One of the town’s unscrupulous citizens decided to play a trick on her. He dropped a side of bacon and a sack of corn meal down her chimney. It landed in front of her as she knelt in prayer. Jumping to her feet, she exclaimed, “Oh Lord! You have answered my prayer!” Then she went all over town telling everyone the good news. This was too much for the scoundrel who dropped the food down her chimney. He ridiculed her publicly and told her that God did not answer her prayer; he did.

DECISION WITHOUT DISCERNMENT

The servants went and told their master what had happened and wanted to go into the field and tear out the weeds. The farmer knew that now the roots would be so intertwined that it would be impossible to dig up one without disturbing the other. If they tried to dig up the weeds much of the good crop of wheat would also be lost. The roots of darnel are stronger and go deeper than the roots of wheat. Removing one would result in the uprooting of the other. Both must be left until harvest time. In the Bible harvest is often used as a picture of judgment. Jesus says the good seed are the **children of the kingdom**. They are those who truly belong to the kingdom of the Messiah. It is for their sake that the weeds must not be pulled up. This is the reality of the world in which we live. It is not that Jesus does not care about the state of the world. He wants all his people to be gathered in, so he will not risk doing anything that might lose some of them. The servants do not have the ability to get rid of all the weeds without sometimes plucking up the wheat. We live and must go on living in an imperfect world. Nothing we can do will change that. It does not mean we should do nothing about injustice, violence and wrong. We have always to be careful that we do not do more harm than good. Lack of discernment can lead to embarrassment and even bitter disillusionment.

President Coolidge once invited some friends from Vermont to dine at the White House. They were worried about their table manners, so they decided to do everything their host did. All went well until coffee was served. Coolidge poured his into the saucer. The guests did the same. The President added sugar and cream. So did the visitors. Then Coolidge leaned over and placed his saucer on the floor for the cat.

Making decisions is simple: Get the facts; seek God’s guidance; form a judgment; act on it; worry no more. (Charles E. Bennett)

Evil is only temporary. Our task is to live as faithfully and as obediently as we can, confident in the certainty of the harvest.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, when hatred and vindictiveness were rampant in the land, President Lincoln sought to stem the tide of judgment and reprisal. When Senator Sumner of Massachusetts pressed him to have Jefferson Davis summarily hanged, Lincoln twice repeated our Lord’s admonition, “Judge not, that ye be not judged”. Though he had vanquished Davis as an enemy, Lincoln refused to condemn him as a man. He chose to leave that final judgment to his Creator.

DECISIVE DECREE

Matt 13:40 - 41 ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his