

The Parables of Jesus: Stories About Judgment Sunday, 7/28/19

1 When Jana and I moved to Hanover five years ago, we bought a model house that didn't even have grass yet, so we took the probably once in a lifetime step of hiring a landscaper. We were pretty pleased with his plan once we made some strategic revisions, like adding some more trees and swapping out some of the flowers planned for around the perimeter of the house. In particular, we noticed that he hadn't included any daylilies. At our last house, we loved our daylilies. It seemed they were flowering all summer long and they never died due to neglect. So we asked the landscaper. What did he say? "Daylilies? Those are actually weeds, you know. People pay me to get rid of them from their flower beds." Guess what. We planted daylilies anyway. Not the invasive orange variety, but yellow ones, and they're gorgeous. The next year we dug some up, divided split them in half, and gave some to our neighbors. The next year we planted some tall red daylilies from the garden of Kris Dirks- the same kind we have growing in the front of the church. Our yard has never looked so nice. God has sure created some amazingly beautiful weeds! As we continue our summer series discovering the parables of Jesus, we'll tackle the issue of separating out the wheat (or the flowers) from the weeds. Mike and Jana Knutson have a sort of "He Said/ She Said" story to tell you about flowers and weeds.

2 Mike: *When we were new homeowners, I decided to try gardening. However, I didn't grow up with a backyard garden, so my first attempts were guided in large part through library books and online articles. I started with a few raised beds, and even though I was trying the intensive planting practices of square foot gardening, I quickly ran out of space to plant all of the seeds I was hoping to plant.*

As I was looking for other places to put seeds, I noticed a spot that I thought was worth trying – under the eaves of along the west side of the garage. The grass wasn't doing very well here, the spot was difficult to mow, and the run off from the roof created a dead divot parallel to the garage. I turned the soil in this patch and was careful to pull out all of the weeds and roots that I saw. After all of this hard work, I went inside to clean up and grab some seed packets. I did clean up, but as life has a way of doing, something else came up and I didn't get seeds in the ground...for a few weeks. Frankly, I kind of forgot about it.

One day, as I was headed to the garage, I noticed that this strip of ground was no longer dormant and waiting. It was covered in a lush carpet of new growth. As I said previously, I didn't know a lot about gardening, but I did know these two things: 1) The earlier you take care of weeds, the better. 2) I hadn't planted anything here yet, so I didn't have to worry about killing any good plants as I hoed. I attacked the area and made short work of the tiny new plants. I realized it was finally time to get my seeds in the ground.

Jana: *Let's hit the pause button on Mike here for a minute. I am not a gardener. I don't really have any desire to garden and, for the most part, if I can't eat it, I don't want to plant it. If Mike wanted to plant some veggies, I was in favor, so long as most of the actual gardening was his thing. Freezing, canning...those are things I would help with, but the actually planting and maintaining was going to be Mike's thing. We agreed on this division of labor and hit the ground running with our garden plan.*

I had noticed the stretch of ground next to the garage. It was all set for something to be planted and as the days went by it was pretty clear to me that Mike didn't have a plan for it. One afternoon, I was digging through the junk drawer in the kitchen. You know the drawer: miscellaneous keys, electric tape, a box of matches, a broken screwdriver, some zip ties and other odds and ends that are hard to part with. I came across a packet of wildflower seeds...something Elizabeth had brought home from preschool. I looked out the window and saw that ready patch of land next to the garage and thought, "Why not?" I scattered them in the waiting plot and left them to grow.

Mike: *A couple of weeks later when Jana mentioned in passing that she had planted wild flower seeds by the garage and she was surprised they hadn't started to grow yet. The wheels upstairs turn a few cogs and then a sheepish grin covered my face. After I explained what happened, we both had a good laugh about it and it still makes us smile today. And, because I'm not a complete fool, even though I have zero interest in growing ornamentals, every planting in this plot since has been exclusively wild flowers or sunflowers.*

3 Ouch! It's really true that sometimes we mistake weeds for flowers and flowers for weeds, although in the parable of the weeds (also called the parable of the tares), the issue at hand was not that the farm hands couldn't tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds. The history of the interpretation of this parable is a great example of some of the

ways we wind up getting the parables wrong. In almost every commentary I've read on this parable, I find an explanation that the weed was probably the darnel plant, which is not only difficult to distinguish from wheat in its early growth stages, but is also poisonous to eat. You can imagine, or simply go and read, all the imaginative lessons that are gleaned from those suppositions. But parables are simple stories that have one main point, and we can understand that main point without making any assumptions whatsoever about what kind of weed Jesus was talking about. That's a relief, isn't it? You really don't have to be a Bible scholar or a first century Palestinian Jew to understand this parable. As usual, we can find plenty of help understanding it by reading the material before and after the parable. Which brings us to the parable of the net. I'm reading from Matthew 13, verses 47-50 in the New Living Translation [{Read Bible Passage}](#).

4 If the parable of the weeds made you a little uncomfortable, I imagine the parable of the net wasn't any better. Which image is more terrifying? Being burned up in a bundle with the other weeds, or being thrown out with the bad fish? Gospel teachings about God's judgment aren't comfortable because they don't seem like good news. It doesn't help that Jesus uses such vivid and scary images! But that's what we have here. Two parables that teach us about God's judgment on God's people, not today but on the final day, the day of the harvest, the day when the fishing net is drawn in. In some ways, these parables aren't too different than some of the other teachings in Matthew's Gospel on final judgement. You might remember the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25¹ or the separation of the wheat and the chaff in Matthew 3.² It's clear that the Gospels teach that there will come a time when either Jesus, through the agency of God's angels, will not only judge us, but will also separate us. There will be no shades of gray at that judgment. We'll either receive the gift of eternal life, or we'll be finally and completely cut off from the fellowship of God and other believers. The question is, how can we possibly see this as good news?

5 Humor sometimes helps us to talk about difficult things. That's why I love the

¹ Matthew 25:31-46.

² Matthew 3:11-12

Lego-inspired Brick Bible³ and Brick Testament.⁴ This image appears to be a depiction of God's angels casting unbelievers into the lake of fire, an image that's actually a conflation of a variety of texts in the Bible. But it makes the point, doesn't it? Whether it's burning weeds, a lake of fire, or a garbage pile of rotten fish, Jesus and the entirety of the Scriptures are consistently clear that there will come a day when those who love Jesus will be separated from those who do evil. Clearly, that must be important to main point of both the parable of the net and the parable of the weeds. Let's look to Jesus now as we read his explanation of the parable of the weeds. I'm reading from Matthew 13:37-43, again in the New Living Translation. [{Read Bible}](#)

6 If you look at your bookmark at the Tips for Interpreting Parables, you'll see about half-way down that a turning point in the story will often reveal the main point of a parable. That's true for the parable of the weeds, where the surprise comes in the master's decision to delay uprooting the weeds until the harvest time. Why the delay? Because the weeds and the wheat are inter-rooted, so that uprooting the weeds might damage the wheat. Furthermore, in the explanation given by Jesus, it's made clear that it's not us who will do the sorting, but rather the angels sent by Jesus. Since the parable is given for our benefit, the main point is clearly this: It's not our job to sort out the evil people from the good people in this world. In fact, if we try to do so, we're likely to end up hurting those who may have otherwise borne fruit for the Kingdom of Heaven. By the way, notice that here and in many other places in the Gospels, it's not what we profess with our lips alone that qualifies us to be wheat, but what we do. Those who do evil will be judged.

On the one hand, this is profoundly bad news, because all of us have sinned and done that which Jesus would call evil. That means that, apart from the grace of Jesus, we all stand condemned. On the other hand, this teaching is astonishingly good news for at least three reasons. The first is that it frees us from the heavy burden of trying to be responsible for other people's bad choices and evil deeds. When Jesus instructed us not to judge other people, it was at least as much for our own sakes as for the sake of those we judge. Seating yourself on the throne of God is just something we were never equipped to do, and to

³ <http://thebrickbible.com>

⁴ <http://www.thebricktestament.com>

attempt to do it is simply self-destructive.

The second way this is good news is that it shows us that God really does have a plan for reigning in the evil of this world and bringing about the full consummation of heaven on earth. The Kingdom of Heaven won't include things that are contrary to God's character, including death, hunger, disease, pain, and any other broken part of the image of God's original creation. Who of us in their right minds would want to live in this current world for eternity? No, eternal life is going to be better, and part of the way that will come about is the future culling out of those who do the work of the evil one.

The third way this is good news is that it affirms our decision and commitment to follow Jesus. Since we're all going to stand for judgment, can you imagine anyone other than Jesus whom you'd rather be judged by? Jesus is the one who said he came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.⁵ Jesus is the one who invites us to take his yoke upon us, because it's easy and his burden is light.⁶ Jesus is the one who died and rose again, that we might have eternal life. Jesus is the one who still holds out his hand to each one of us and invites us to turn away from evil and receive the full pardon that only God can give.

So what are we to do in the meantime as we wait for the final day? The apostle Paul said it so well in Romans 12:21, "Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good."⁷ Our job is not to root out the weeds. God will take care of that later. Our job is to focus on the work of the wheat, living righteously in the example and teaching of Jesus. I'd say we have more than enough on our hands with that job without taking on the work of trying to weed God's garden, wouldn't you?

⁵ John 10:10

⁶ Matthew 11:29-30

⁷ New Living Translation (2nd Edition)



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