

God's Patience

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” Matthew 13:30

Life demands lots of patience but it's often in short supply. I'd imagine all of us have personal examples to confirm this statement. Well, this challenge of having enough patience comes up in our Gospel reading this weekend. Patience is something that the master is willing to give his messed up field. Despite an enemy's attempt to ruin things, the master isn't distraught or panicked. He continues to be concerned about the good seed he's sown and isn't willing to put any of what he's sown in jeopardy.

Like last week's parable about the seed and the soils, Jesus clearly explains this weekend's parable. The Son of Man, think Jesus, plants the wheat. The field where He plants is the world. In that field, the wheat is the children of the kingdom and the weeds are offspring of the enemy, the devil. The harvest is Judgement Day and the reapers are angels. Most everything is nicely matched, except for the servants. And it's the servants who help highlight this parable's theme of patience the most.

Now, I don't want any of us to get hung up on this exception. While the servants aren't directly matched to anything, they are the ones listening to the master, the Son of Man, Jesus, and so to connect these servants with those hearing Jesus tell this parable both then and now isn't a stretch. Originally, the servants connected to the crowd and Jesus' disciples and now this weekend, we too are connected to those servants in the parable.

With this connection, we have words put into our mouths. The servants' questions of the master are our questions of Jesus, of God. **“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? ... Then do you want us to go and gather them?”** (Matthew 13:27-28) These three questions are all related to the topic of patience, or maybe more accurately impatience. Underlying these questions are the impatience with God, the impatience with others, and the impatience with the roles God gives.

Listen to the first two questions again, **“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?”** (Matthew 13:27) The servants who had missed the enemy's work while they slept are now caught off guard and wondering about their master. Does he know what he's doing? He did use the correct seed, right? If he knows what he's doing, then why aren't things all neat and tidy? This isn't what they expect, and they're concerned.

Likewise, we can look at this world and wonder what's going on. Does God really know what He's doing? Is He using the correct tools for His kingdom work? If does know what He's doing why is this world so chaotic and messy? Shouldn't things be crystal clear in this world? Like the parable's servants, we too become concerned because what we see in this world isn't what we expect for the God who promises to be in control. The more we see this mess and live in it, it's not hard for us to lose patience with God!

But God answers His servants. The mess that we worry He might be responsible for or just unable to address truly isn't His work. It's the work of the enemy – the work of Satan! So then, there's some relief. There's someone to blame and it's not our master and God – not that we'd ever come close to blaming Him for all this mess! With a clear reason for this trouble, it makes sense to move forward and eliminate the problem! And so, we offer, **“Then do you want us to go and gather them?”** (Matthew 13:28)

It seems like a reasonable question. No time like the present to get rid of an issue and we certainly don't want things to get further out of control! Don't worry God, we got this! We know what to do. We'll be extra careful, and we're sure that You'll understand, when we sometimes uproot some wheat instead of weeds. It happens, right? It's just important that we get this taken care of now. So, we'll just try and get as much as we can.

However, our Lord and Master, doesn't share our same short-sighted patience. Instead of living with acceptable losses and okaying our panicked plan, He halts our misguided mission. **“No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.”** (Matthew 13:30) Jesus isn't impatient to make things worse – to judge prematurely. He's willing to care for both the wheat and the weeds until the harvest. Jesus knows that the harvest shouldn't be rushed and will give His wheat the time He knows it needs.

“Then do you want us to go and gather them?” (Matthew 13:28) This question to our God doesn't just reveal our impatience with others, it also reveals our impatience with our role in God's kingdom. You see, this question assumes that we're the ones who are supposed to do the gathering. But according to the parable, that's the angels' role! And harvest time, Judgement Day, according to this parable requires no help from the servants!

Yet, in our impatience, it's easy for us to try and take on a role that isn't ours. Maybe it's just because we want to help? Maybe it's because we think we know best? Maybe it's because we're fearful things won't go well if we wait? We can try to justify things in the best way possible, however that still doesn't cover up our impatience with the reality that this isn't our job. As our Lord and Master reveals, **“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”** (*Matthew 13:30*)

So dear friends, we entered these words from Jesus by the connection to the servants. Entering the parable this way has done two things for us. First, we must face the limits of our patience. We grow impatient with God's patience – why does He let this mess continue? We grow impatient with those around us – why can't they just get it together and act like wheat like us? We grow impatient with our role – why can't we help God clean this up doesn't He see what we see? And truly what's underneath all our impatience is our ultimate sinful desire to be God.

Faced with this reality, that brings us to the second thing we deal with when we enter this parable through the connection to the servants. We have no way out of this parable. If we cling onto our connection to the servants, there is no exit. I think this is one of the reasons Jesus never gives a match to the servants in His explanation. We can't leave His words thinking that we're outside of them. We can't act as if we're outside the field. We're in the field. And as God's Law is showing us our prideful and impatient thinking – that assumption that we somehow can see, this field, this world, better than He can – we are humbled to realize we remain in the field. And then in this broken and humble state, by His grace and mercy in the Gospel, He provides the exit from this parable.

Our exit out of this parable is the gracious truth that our Lord and Savior lived and died to make us wheat. The Master of the field entered the field to die so that His death might produce much fruit, even you and me! **“... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** (*John 12:24*) That's what Jesus did for you and for me. He lived and died so that we might become children of the kingdom, children of God.

And as you know well, there is more to our Lord's exit strategy. He didn't just live and die, He rose! He rose for us so that our exit from this parable ends in the certainty that we are a part of the righteous who will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father! The rising of the Son, S-o-n, Jesus, delivers to us something brilliant to reflect, His righteousness, His forgiveness, His love, and yes, even His patience.

Yes, this connection to Jesus changes the way we live and grow in this world, in our Master's field. No longer are we anxious servants worried about the Master's abilities and attempting to see beyond our own ability. We are golden wheat rooted in the field, in this world, patiently focused on our Master and Savior who has never lost control of the field even when an enemy has tried to make it look that way.

No longer are we insecure servants so worried about the weeds that we overlook the wheat. We are golden wheat patiently living among weeds clinging to the nourishment that our Lord and Master provides. For it's the Master who sows good seed, assuring us that we are His wheat. Instead of getting tangled up in unfruitful comparisons to others in the field, we take in the certainty of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for us. We stand confident as wheat ready for the harvest because of what Christ delivers to us through His Word and Sacraments.

No longer are we selfish servants trying to carry out roles that aren't ours. We are golden wheat that produces right where God has planted us. We grow, reflecting the gracious care of our God and recognizing that the patience He has with others, is the same patience He has given us. We give thanks that our God willingly cares for both the wheat and the weeds until the harvest because that common care gives us the ongoing hope to encourage all around us to receive, reflect, and remain in the Master's care as we await His return. We trust that as the Master of the field, He can see the entirety of the field with greater patience and understanding than we can rooted in our one spot of the field.

Dear fellow golden wheat, we entered this parable through our connection to the parable's servants, but my dear friends, we exit this parable through the connection God has given us to via the Suffering Servant, our risen Savior Jesus Christ. And in this connection, we pray that the Lord would grant us His patience for His kingdom work, His patience for those growing around us, and His patience for the role in which He has given us to bloom and grow. God grant this to us for Jesus' sake, Amen.

In Christ,
Pastor Dan