

Ordinary Time 16A 2017

The Just Judge

In today's gospel Jesus tells us three parables about the kingdom of heaven: (1) the parable of the weeds and the wheat, (2) the parable of the mustard seed, and (3) the parable of the yeast. Although the disciples understand the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast, they are puzzled by the parable of the weeds and the wheat. And so, when they are alone with Jesus, they ask him what this parable means.

We understand the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, they say. They are parables about the hidden way in which the kingdom of heaven grows. The kingdom starts like a tiny seed or a little leaven, and then through God's power, it grows in a way we could never have imagined. But what is the meaning of the parable about the weeds and wheat?

And so Jesus explains the parable to them. I am the farmer, and the seed is the Word that I preach about the Kingdom of heaven. The wheat represents those who accept the message of the kingdom that I preach, and live according to it. The weeds represent those who belong to the Evil One, to Satan, and they do not accept the message of the kingdom. And so, at the present time, good and evil exist side by side.

But some people, like the servants in the parable, find this situation intolerable. They want to pull up the weeds now so that only the wheat remains. They do not understand that by pulling up the weeds they may pull up the wheat as well. Only God can distinguish between the wheat and the weeds. Only God can judge the heart. Only God knows how to judge in fairness and mercy.

People speak to me from time to time about the challenges they face in living the Christian life. And as I listen to them, I am struck by how many of them readily admit they are judgmental. They judge others, even though they know they should not. They try to avoid judging others, but they can't help themselves. When they speak in this way, I understand because I often find myself doing the same thing.

You see, we are like the servants in today's parable. We are eager to separate the good from the bad. We are eager to judge who is right and who is wrong, be it in our family, in the church, or society at large. Like the servants in today's gospel, we want to pull up the weeds now. We want to purify our family, the church, and society. I suppose you might say that we want everyone to be as perfect as we are!

But we all know how foolish this is, and how difficult it is to judge others in fairness and mercy. In today's second reading Saint Paul describes God as "the One who searches hearts." Only God know our hearts and our intentions. Only God know our failures and our strengths because only God can search our heart. This is why only God can judge us. This is why the farmer in today's parable does not allow the servants to pull up the weeds before the harvest.

People need time to change and grow. People need time to reform and change. People need time to experience the mercy and forgiveness of God. Who knows, today's sinner may be tomorrow's saint, and today's saint may be tomorrow's sinner. It is only at the end of the ages that we will be able to distinguish the weeds from wheat. And then God, and only God, will judge with just judgment.

We all need to be a more patient, more forbearing, less judgmental. We need to let God do God's work of judgment. Our work is to forgive!