

God is like a patient farmer – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

A few weeks ago, when I was talking about Abraham and Sarah and laughter and jokes, I came across a joke by US comedian Emo Philips which was voted, some years ago, by website Ship of Fools, 'the best religious joke of all time'. *(By the way, Ship of Fools also publish 'mystery worshipper' reviews of churches and on the 6th June 2021 – 5 years ago now – they reviewed CBC. If you haven't seen it, look it up later. An interesting take on life during Covid!)*

This, however, is the joke!

...I saw a man on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"

He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"

He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too!"

Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

It is sad, isn't it, how much of ourselves we see in that joke, and how much of the way Christianity is perceived. According to 2025 McCrindle Research, 'judging others' is the third highest reason why people who are open to faith reject Christianity.

We are very good, as Christians, at identifying differences amongst us!

Which is what I see happening in this parable.

It is not the same story we heard last week. There are differences! In that story the Sower, representing Jesus, sows seed, the word of God's kingdom, in four different kinds of ground; a hardened path, rocky ground, thorny ground and good soil. And in this story the Sower sows seed, good seed, in his fields, but an enemy comes at night and sows weeds. (If you are looking for a parable – a story about everyday things that illustrates spiritual truth – to explain why God's kingdom is not yet visible in our world, why there is still suffering and injustice, why the world is in such a mess – this is that parable.)

And the obvious answer is to weed out the weeds – as quickly as possible!

But there is a problem with that because, according to the commentaries, scholars identify this weed – *zizania* in Greek – as darnel or in Latin, *Lolium temulentum*, which, while growing, is almost identical to wheat!

Now, if you are an expert, there are some differences! According to Wikipedia, the ears or spikes of *L. temulentum* are thinner than wheat ears and oriented edgewise to the central stem (the *rachis*) and only have a single *glume* (the things that protect the grain). Wheat ears have their flat side to the *rachis* and have two *glumes*. And darnel grains also contain a fungus which causes illness or death if consumed in large quantities.

So, an interesting conversation takes place here between the slaves and the householder, “*Master,*” they say, “*did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?*” I hear a familiar tone in these questions, a tone I hear in my own questions to God! “*God, are you asleep? Are you not working in our world? Why are all these things happening?*”

And then, and I hear myself in this too, the slaves say, confidently, despite the almost identical nature of the wheat and the weeds, “*Do you want us to go and gather them? We’ve got this. We know a weed when we see one!*”

We know a weed when we see one! That is sometimes our attitude, isn’t it? We know whose life is really on track and whose life isn’t. We know who is in the right in a situation and in the wrong! We know who belongs – really belongs, centrally belongs - in the community of faith and who doesn’t. We know what sin – the sin that really matters - looks like! And we know we’re ok, but them over there – the ‘*Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912*’ – are a bunch of heretics!

And we are prepared to weed them out!

But our foolish farmer has other ideas. “*No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at the harvest time... we will sort this out.*” Just as the Sower sowed so generously, so the householder, the field-owner, waits with patience and grace!

We are good, as I said, at recognising differences, but are we as good at recognising similarities?

Do we see we have a common enemy? The evil one who sows bad seed in the world, seed that grows only to poison the life of the world, to hurt the most vulnerable and to deceive those who would be deceived? In Matthew 25, those who did see Jesus in the faces of the “*the least of these*”, who did not feed the hungry, give the thirsty a drink, welcome the strangers, care for the needy, support the sick, and those experiencing injustice discover, to their surprise, they share the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

These are very strong words about what it means to live as children of the kingdom – not saying it is good works (typified by that list in Matthew 25) that lead to entry to the kingdom, but that it is these kinds of compassionate, self-giving, generous and gracious works that characterise those who inhabit it, who will *“shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”*.

Do we also see we have a common problem; that wheat and weeds grow side by side - not as different people in our world or community or churches – but in our own lives? As Paul writes (Romans 7:15 and 19): *“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”*

He sounds like American priest and writer Richard Rohr (or perhaps Rohr sounds like Paul) when he says, *“We are not all weeds, but we are not all wheat, either. We have to learn, even now, to accept and forgive this mixed bag of reality in ourselves and in everybody else. We have to name the weed as a weed.”*

I love the story told about Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton; that *The Times of London* invited famous writers to answer the question: *“What is wrong with the world?”* And in response, they got many long essays spelling out both the problems and, as a bonus, the writer’s assessment as to who was to blame. God, the Devil, the Church, the Communists, the Fascists, White people, Black people, the Jews, the Germans, the Chinese, the Americans, women, men, the ‘older generation’, ‘the young people of today’.

G.K. Chesterton is said to have responded with a one-sentence essay: *Dear Sir, I am. Yours, G.K. Chesterton.*

I am. I am what is wrong with the world today. That mixture of wheat and weeds is all of us. But we have – wonderfully – something else in common as well!

“Who will rescue me from this body of death?” asks Paul, *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!.... There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

We have in common a Saviour who loves us, who plants us as good seed, and who is patient and kind and forgiving, and who waits and waits and waits, sending sun and rain and cold and warm, until the harvest comes. As 2 Peter 3:9 says, *“The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.”* The Lord is patient with you. We have a foolish farmer, foolish in indiscriminate love, and foolish in infinite grace.

Can I invite you to pray a prayer of confession with me and then we will sing together, *“Lord you sometimes speak in wonders...”*

Prayer of Confession by Moira Laidlaw

Merciful God,

you plant each of us like seeds in the same field and together we are nourished and nurtured by the sun. We sway in the wind and are refreshed by the rain. We are blessed by the knowledge that you want us to grow towards what you call us to be.

When we deprive others of that same opportunity,

forgive us.

When we want to uproot those whom we believe

do not belong in our part of the field,

forgive us.

When we do not see that all people are made in your image, (changed this line)

forgive us.

When we are reluctant to acknowledge

that we ourselves are a mixture of weeds and wheat,

forgive us.

When we are afraid to look into the fields of our own lives

to see what is growing there,

forgive us.

O God, you know us inside and out, through and through.

You search us out and lay your hand upon us.

You know what we are going to say even before we speak.

So we pray that you will help us to reach out to the uprooted and rejected, the lonely and the outcast,

and to develop and grow the good in ourselves, in others and in the world.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

—[Liturgies Online](#) website.