

*“Gathering In”*

[The video, “Something Beautiful” was shown.] Did that video help you forget the heat outside? The video’s message is unique because it speaks on two levels at the same time. It was obviously about the making of a masterpiece by a craftsman. But the more important communication is about the way God’s Agape – Suffering and Sacrificial Love seeks to heal and transform the broken lives of all people. What may help us perceive that message is substituting for the words “things” and “pieces” the term “persons”. Taking that into consideration, let’s hear, again, the video’s Love Letter from God, while substituting “persons” for “things” and “pieces”. The Divine Parent says, “I am seeking, searching for the [persons] this world has rejected – the [persons] that are broken – that are flawed – thrown away and discarded. I seek the lost – the damaged – the forgotten [persons] – the overlooked and the neglected – the [persons] that have been pushed aside and left behind.” “Why – why do I do this? Why chase after that which is despised by so many? It is because I have chosen the rejected. I bring restoration to the broken. I see beyond the flaws – the imperfections and I bring New Life to the lost.” **“This world has called them useless and garbage – hopeless and unwanted. They’ve been scarred, abused, ignored, and unloved. But I – I have reclaimed them and they belong to Me now. They are My masterpiece and I have a plan and a future for every single one. For I am crafting these dissonant and discarded [persons] into something beautiful.”**

The video’s message about God’s Transforming Love might seem to be about someone else – an outcast or a person full of despair but the truth is everyone is in need of our Divine Parent’s Forgiveness, Healing, Welcome, Unconditional Love, and New Life! The video goes well with our God Is Still Speaking emphasis and Jesus’ focus in today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading. However, the Scripture may come across a bit confusing and strange. The Reading comes in two parts. The first section is the parable and the second portion is Jesus’ explanation about the parable’s meaning. The parable by itself is very much in line with the positive and loving message suggested by the video. However, the second part of the Scripture not only explains what each element of the parable represents but it goes on to threaten eternal suffering for the weeds – the persons, who belong to the “Evil One”. Yet, even then, we are reminded, it is ultimately up to our loving Savior and our Loving Divine Parent, Who decides who is still a weed. Both the parable and the interpretation of it are only found in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew’s gospel has a Jewish legalistic bias, so as we will see, it is ironic that he included it in his gospel. Furthermore, my assumption is Matthew’s source for what Jesus gave as his interpretation of the parable is not totally in sync with our Savior’s meaning and purpose for the parable.

Jesus began the parable by reporting that a sower sowed good seeds and then an enemy sowed weed seeds. Matthew reported Jesus explained elements of the parable in **verse 38, “the field is the world; the good seed is the people who belong to the Kingdom; the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One”**. Now, supporters of the legalistic Jews would have been very happy to hear Jesus say that verse because it went well with their desire to consider themselves to be God’s Beloved People, while everyone else, who did not follow their example, would be considered a “sinner” or someone, who belongs to the “Evil One”. However, Matthew’s legalistic leanings weren’t heavily employed in the first part of our Scripture – the actual telling of the parable. I suspect, Jesus’ meaning was much more in line with that of the former children’s TV star and theologian, Rev. Fred Rogers. He said, **“Have you ever noticed that the very same people who are bad sometimes are the very same people who are good sometimes?”** (As told by Philip W. McLarty, The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares) Philip McLarty provides us an anonymous story, “Two Wolves”, which goes along with that insight. He wrote, “An old Cherokee once told his grandson about a fight that was going on inside of him. He said it was between two wolves. One was evil: anger, envy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, gossip, resentment, and false pride. The other was good: joy,

peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather, ‘Which wolf do you think will win?’ The old Cherokee replied, ‘The one I feed.’” (As told by Philip W. McLarty, The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares)

The legalistic Jews would have acknowledged that a person can choose to do good or bad things but they were very quick to condemn those who were caught doing something evil or bad. Jesus knew they were tempted to judge quickly, reject, and then, get rid of the bad seed. That is why he included the questioning of the sower’s servants in the parable in **verse 28b** ***“Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?”***

Jesus, however, was not supportive of the legalists’ desire of quick judgement and punishment for the weeds – the “sinners”. So, he went on to say in **verses 29 - 30a** ***“No, because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest.”*** Now, our society has pretty much bought into the legalism, which the servants in the parable exhibited – which Jesus’ adversaries were models of in Jewish culture. So, the sower’s response – Jesus’ response was shocking and exposed the downfall of that aspect of Jewish practices. Yes, when one rejects someone else – writes them off too early, then the whole community suffers! Clearly, Jesus did not and does not want his followers – including us to make the same mistake.

James Somerville provides a helpful report, which reveals an example, of how people of faith did better than follow the model of the Jewish legalists. He wrote, “When a church in Wingate, North Carolina, began a ministry to the children of a nearby trailer park, they had to decide what kind of ministry it would be. They could have chosen to root out all the sources of evil in that place – to chase down the drug dealers and the deadbeat dads, to confiscate handguns and arrest child abusers. Instead, they chose to put up a basketball goal, to tell stories from the Bible, to put their arms around little children, and sing songs about Jesus. And two years after they started that ministry, two years of going out there Saturday after Saturday to do those things, the pastor got a note in his box at church with five words on it: ‘Adrian wants to be baptized.’ Adrian. The terror of the trailer park. That little girl who had made their work most difficult during the previous two years. Who would have guessed?”

Somerville concludes, “Instead of pulling weeds in the field where she lived, they just tried hard to be wheat, and somehow Adrian saw that and fell in love with it and wanted it for herself. After she was baptized, there was a little more wheat in the field. And because she was there, soon, there was even more.” (James Somerville, A World Full of Weeds)

Many Jewish Christians in the early Church would have been happy to hear the part of the parable when Jesus said he would send the harvest workers in **verse 30b**, ***“to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.”*** However, it is important to note that in verse 41, Jesus said he would send out angels to do this harvest of the weeds and not the members of the church. It is not our job to act like the Jewish legalists, who quickly judged wrongdoers, rejected them, and punished them! God and Jesus will do whatever judging there is when the Kingdom of God is fulfilled. Instead of following the example of the legalists, our call, as members of the Body of Christ, is to welcome all people with God’s Agape Love, so even those prone to be weeds might experience transformation – have the opportunity to receive the invitation, forgiveness, healing, welcome, and unconditional love of God!

This following video makes some powerful suggestions about how we can be part of Jesus’ Gathering In of all people – be agents of his transforming of the lives of those, who might otherwise end up as weeds – victims of their own self-destructive behavior. [The video, “Change the Story” was shown.] We can help change the story for many people! **Listening and responding to Jesus and our Still Speaking God, we will invite, welcome, love, heal, and show God’s forgiveness to everyone!** Amen.