

St. Paul's Anglican Church
5th Sun Epiphany
Matthew 13:24 to 30; Feb 10, 2019

The Rev. Father Tom Burr

This is our last Sunday in the Epiphany season; the time we remember and give thanks that God's plan for salvation was to come through Israel, but was always intended to include the other nations in the world. All who have faith in our Lord can be saved.

Next Sunday we enter Pre-Lent; the time to begin seriously looking within ourselves to identify and correct those areas of our lives that are lacking when compared to the example Jesus set for us. We will always come in second in this comparison, but that is okay; the goal is to strive for perfection realizing we will not attain it in this life. And, a period of sincere introspection and correction promotes a more glorious celebration of our Savior's resurrection on Easter morning.

This morning's readings serve as a link between Epiphany and Lent, a link between being inwardly thankful for God's underserved grace and outwardly demonstrating that thankfulness. In the gospel, Jesus shows us the great reward promised to all who believe, contrasted with the eternal punishment for those who do not. The epistle (Col. 3:12-17) notes several traits of believers while the Old Testament reading (Hab. 1:12-2:4, 9-14) gives us attributes of unbelievers.

In the very first sentence in the gospel, Jesus states the condition of his Church as it existed centuries ago, continues today, and was in every age in between. He said, **the kingdom of heaven is like a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.** The kingdom of heaven is Christ's Church on earth, the Good Man is our Lord, the good seed which grows to be the wheat are those who are faithful followers of Him, the enemy is the devil,

and the tares (weeds) are those within the Church who proclaim faith in Jesus but are under Satan's control.

When the servants saw there were weeds growing with the wheat, they asked God if they should tear the weeds out by their roots; should they rid Christ's Church of the evil people within it. We may have a similar thought when we see all the evil in today's world; why doesn't God just send his army of angels and rid the earth of rapists, child abusers, murderers, and, maybe even false Christians?

Remember, He already did this; only Noah was found to be righteous, or good. Only Noah's family was spared from the great flood, but when the waters receded, sin still flourished through Noah's family and their descendants.

Speaking specifically about Christ's Church, God's answer was, **No! While you gather up the weeds you may also pull up the wheat with them.** There may be collateral damage; wheat and weeds often look alike; faithful and false Christians often share the same outward appearance. We may also see in this statement the possibility that, through the working of the Holy Spirit, some under the influence of Satan may come to true faith in Jesus Christ.

At any rate, God said, **Let both grow together, and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather first the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.** In the last days sincere men and woman of faith will be gathered into God's heavenly barn, while unbelievers, both inside and outside of the Church, will suffer drastic consequences.

Gather the weeds to burn them sounds like the basis of the perfect "fire and brimstone" sermon; "sin once and you will burn in hell!" But this is not God's plan; if it was, He would not have sent our Savior to die so our sins could be forgiven.

Through our faith in Jesus Christ, our confessed sins are forgiven, so we do not have to be perfect to be part of God's Kingdom here on earth, and later in heaven; but our lives should reflect our faith. In the epistle, St. Paul tells the new believers in Colossae that since they have turned to a new life in Christ, certain

virtues should be visible in their interactions with other believers; their lives should reflect their faith.

Paul said the virtues, or qualities, of **compassion, kindness, humbleness, meekness, patience**; while **forbearing and forgiving one another** should be evident in every Christian's behavior; he is describing the "wheat" in the gospel reading. Instead of bickering, complaining and holding a grudge when a brother or sister offend us, we are to exhibit godly understanding, remembering, as Christ forgave our sins, we must forgive theirs. And, we are to practice these virtues, not because it is expected of us, but because of our love for each other.

There is a short saying on the internet that goes something like this; "For 50 years I've wondered how the scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz could talk if he didn't have a brain. Then I got on Facebook; now I understand!"

We all come up short at times, speaking before we think, acting before we consider the consequences. It is easy to be upset by the little annoyances of others, but if we sincerely follow Paul's instruction to **let the peace of God rule in your hearts**, we will recognize the fact that we probably share most of the same faults we see in others; we will not be blinded to our own short-comings.

We can tell if the **peace of God is ruling our hearts** by checking our deepest motives for our behavior. Paul said, **whatever you do in word or deed, do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God. Do our actions and reactions show compassion, kindness, humbleness, meekness, and patience?** Would we be ashamed to tell our Lord face to face that what we did, we did for Him? Will we be able to thank God for his guidance, or need to seek his forgiveness?

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Habakkuk speaks about two nations who need to seek God's forgiveness; he prophesies about God's coming judgments against Judah, which will be accomplished by the wicked Babylonians, and later against Babylon, at the hands of the Persians. The difference in these two

events is that the righteous of Judah, those who remained faithful to God, will eventually be the victor because of their faith.

Habakkuk understood why his country must be disciplined, but he questioned God as to why He will use an evil nation to punish his chosen people. The prophet makes his case by describing the evil nature of Babylon. He asks, **Shall they therefore empty their net, and not continue to slay the nations?**

“They have devoured other nations, so if You allow them to put Judah in bondage, will they not continue to do the same?”

The unrighteous Babylonians possessed the traits of the “weeds” in the gospel; they have little regard for the rights and needs of others; their own welfare comes first. They do not care about obeying, much less, pleasing God. They do not follow God’s teaching; they determine their own right and wrong.

We could say that Habakkuk described the weeds as those whose **soul is lifted up** (those full of unwarranted pride) and the wheat as **the just shall live by his faith.**

The beauty of God’s plan is that, occasionally being guided by our pride instead of our faith, does not mean our salvation is in question; it means we need to polish our Christian witness. And, though we cannot change the past, we can prepare for the future by living as righteously as is humanly possible today. We must strive to be like the wheat; and seek God’s forgiveness when we act like the weeds.

That is why introspection during Lent is important; it gives us the opportunity to look within ourselves to evaluate our behavior. It offers us the means to grow spiritually.

And though the ungodly in this world may mistake our **compassion, kindness, humbleness, meekness, patience,** and our willingness **to forgive others** as a sign of weakness, we will know in our hearts, that these are heavenly signs of our “wheatness!”

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, power, dominion, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.