

“Stay positive!”

Psalm 84, Matthew 13:24-43

One commentator described what happened in Matthew’s gospel reading today as an act of agricultural terrorism.

Agricultural terrorism.

Which ---- while rather dramatic --- is also a pretty good description of what actually took place.

A farmer has gone along and planted wheat seeds in a very systematic --- calculated --- organized --- row by row --- adequate space by adequate space kind of way ----- just as any good professional --- live or starve by his crops ----- kind of farmer would do.

And then --- when the farmer slept ---- someone came along and sowed weeds among the wheat.

Agricultural terrorism ----- someone actively trying to destroy what someone else was nurturing to life.

But rather than try to fix it --- and take things into his own hands --- as we might suppose the farmer would do.

When his hired hands ask him if they should pull out the weeds ----- he replies ---- beginning in verse 29 ---- “No ----- because while you are pulling the weeds you may root up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest.”

No --- don’t try to uproot them --- let them both grow together until the harvest.

Curious response from a professional farmer ---- to his hired hands.

But the farmer knew that these weeds were no regular weeds.

In the ancient near east there was a weed known as darnel --- or more appropriately bearded darnel.

And in the early stages of growth they so closely resembled wheat that it was virtually impossible to tell them apart.

Only once the good wheat and bad darnel had produced their seed were they distinguishable ---- unfortunately however ---- by that time their roots would have been so intertwined --- that it would have been impossible to pull one out without also pulling the other up at the same time.

W. M Thompson in his book *“The Land and the Book”* --- shares his reflections when he saw the exact growth that Jesus refers to in Matthew’s gospel today saying ---

“The grain is just in the proper stage of development to illustrate the parable. In those parts where the grain has produced seed heads ----- the darnel has done exactly the same --- and there a child cannot mistake them for wheat or barley --- but when both are less developed ---- the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them.

I --- for one --- cannot do it at all with any confidence.

Even the farmers ---- who in this country generally weed their fields ---- do not attempt to separate the one from the other. They would not only mistake good grain for them --- but very commonly the roots of the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them without plucking up both. Both therefore must be left to grow until the time of harvest.”

Clearly these darnel weeds --- were not your everyday ---- need to simply be plucked up kind of weed ----- they were far more nasty.

Any farmer may have tried to pluck them up ----- and lost their whole crop -- but the patient --- focus on the positive --- leave it in God’s hands kind of farmer --- knew that sometimes great crops grow amidst --- and despite the weeds and challenges around them.

This farmer knew that he had to basically ignore the weeds --- and stay focused on the wheat --- and that despite these weeds his crop would still grow and come to gainful harvest.

The farmer had to show patience --- resolve ---- and faith.

He had to resist the temptation to take things into his own hands --- like he usually would have --- and instead just leave these nasty weeds right where they were.

He had to be patient and positive ---- and shift his focus away from the distraction of the weeds.

Sometimes we think of patience as only something we exercise when we cannot do anything else ---- like waiting in the doctor's office or being stuck in traffic.

Which is true ---- sometimes patience is simply waiting in the face of helplessness --- circumstances that we cannot change no matter how hard we try.

And sometimes we see patience as laziness --- an excuse not to do something.

Anyone ever had these kinds of conversations --- "Hey ---- have you spoken to so and so about their poor behaviour the other day. "No --- I'm patiently waiting for the right opportunity." ----- "Oh --- you mean you're procrastinating." --- anyone ever had this kind of conversation ----- out loud --- or in your head.

Patience --- includes remaining calm in circumstances that we cannot change.

Patience includes waiting for something to happen without us ever having to act or expend energy or effort.

And ----- sometimes ---- patience is about discernment --- waiting for the right time --- the best opportunity to act and speak.

Patience is sometimes passive.

And patience is sometimes active --- as this parable demonstrates.

Patience doesn't always just point to the future--- it can also be all about right now --- holding back --- actively avoiding ----- quick and snappy ----- distracted --- side tracked ----- knee jerk ----- kind of responses.

Patience sometimes means keeping yourself in check --- keeping your anxieties in check --- and letting God work things out differently than you would ever imagine.

The instinct of the farmer's hired hands is to pull out the weeds like they would with any other crop --- but that simply cannot happen here without disastrous results.

If they were to go at the wheat field with all the gusto they normally would at pulling out weeds they'd kill the entire crop in one go.

Instead they need patience --- and they need to focus on the positive --- the wheat has taken root and is growing amidst the weeds.

True patience has its own kind of roots --- and those roots are sunken deep into the soil of faith.

True patience has its own kind of roots --- roots that are sunken deep into the soil of faith.

True patience at its heart is the ability to focus on the positive --- and ----- as our Psalm today says --- verse 7 --- go from strength to strength.

True patience at its heart is the ability to focus on the positive --- and go from strength to strength.

Too often we want to take things into our own hands when we are far better off leaving them in God's.

Yes we can often right small injustices in the world ----- someone budding in front of others ----- calling to accountability certain things in life ----- but true evil is something we cannot ever eradicate or right.

We have to have the great confidence --- the great positive attitude --- the great faith --- that good and true --- and faithful things grow and transpire and take root in life --- despite the weeds and evil that surround them.

We can't ever be so idealistic to think that all the evil has to be weeded out before the good can take root.

Evil will always be with us --- challenges will always bother us --- until Christ comes again.

We have to grow the gospel not seeking perfect conditions --- but trusting in God and focusing on the right things.

We have to grow the gospel --- and share the gospel ---- and live lives worthy of the gospel --- in the midst of great spiritual and emotional challenges all around us.

If we focus on uprooting and eradicating all the challenges in our lives we'll never end of nurturing the gospel and it will fall away from us precisely because we have allowed ourselves to be distracted and side tracked by evil instead of focusing on the good --- the gospel.

The farmer could have chosen to focus on the negative in his garden and ripped out the weeds and in the process killed all of his produce --- but he didn't.

God will deal with the negative --- the evil in the world --- that's not our calling in Christ --- that is for Christ and not us.

Picking it up at verse 40 from the gospel today ---- "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil."

Christ and His angels will look after everything that causes sin and evil ----- so we need to let this go --- and get on with the gospel of Christ ----- and go from strength to strength --- and love God ----- and care for others --- sharing what we have with those less fortunate than ourselves ----- and treat everyone the way we would treat Christ Himself.

Congregational development guru Kennon Callahan whose books I've read and whose conferences I've attended ----- speaks explicitly about focusing on the positive in life --- and specifically congregational life ----- as this is his gift to the church.

He says that after a congregation determines all of its strengths and weaknesses and then lists them.

He always counsels against congregations looking at their bottom few weaknesses and trying to make them better --- and instead encourages the congregation --- to look at their strengths and focus on growing and further developing them.

And the rationale he gives is this.

He believes that if you focus on your weakness ---- you will drag your strengths down and everything ----- all your top few strengths and your bottom few weaknesses ----- will meet in the middle and you will only ever have mediocrity.

Instead he suggests that congregations ought to play to --- and develop and grow their strengths.

By staying positive and focusing on strengths he believes that everything --- strengths and weakness are lifted up together and the result is a flourishing and growing upward ---- where strengths grow greater and weakness are lifted up in the process.

“Do better what you do best” --- is his advice.

And I think he’s on to something --- yes there may be some necessary nuances to his approach ----- but fundamentally he’s on to something.

Stay positive ---- do better what you do best.

Sometimes we have to do better what we do best and let God --- enable God to do what He will do after this.

Sometimes we simply do the little things and God looks after the bigger things.

Indeed wedged in between the parable of the weeds --- and the explanation of the parable of the weeds ---- are 2 other great parables that drive the point home about having to do the small --- positive --- faithful ---- things and leaving the rest with God.

A tiny mustard seed --- the smallest of small seeds --- grows to be the largest of garden plants.

A tiny bit of yeast can change things drastically ----- verse 33 --- “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

God can do amazing things with tiny --- little things --- like mustard seeds and yeast ----- like ----- small behind the scenes gestures of love and compassion --- things like a few minutes of our time --- a cup of coffee ---- a hug --- a sincere touch of the heart through the touch of a hand and so on --- a few words of encouragement ---- a thank you.

Is it just me or have so many of the social niceties --- that lubricate interpersonal relations--- have fallen by the wayside ----- there is great power and often great compassion and care ---- in a genuine heart felt --- “thank you”.

Sometimes there aren't enough simple --- “thank you's” in the world anymore --- and if you get one ---- remember --- simply say you're welcome ----- but I digress ---- but only kind of --- because this relates to staying positive --- and tending to the little things in life.

We don't have to focus on eradicating evil everywhere ----- ripping up evil things and tossing them aside.

Instead we are more often called to stay focused and grow the good ---- grow the good amidst the evil ---- and sew the good despite the evil.

The parable of the weeds is not just about the end of time and God sorting everything out later --- it's also about right now.

It's all about our ability to share and grow and live the gospel today ---- despite challenges.

Notice that the weeds never threaten the wheat --- they only ever complicate things a bit.

Notice that the weeds never threaten the wheat --- they only complicate things a bit.

The weeds never actually threaten the wheat.

The farmer never displays any concern that his wheat crop will be killed off or die away --- he knows he has to stay focused on the wheat and not the weeds and everything will be just fine.

The threat doesn't come from the weeds ---- the threat come from how he **interacts** with the weeds.

If he gives them too much attention instead of focusing on the wheat ----- he will have an even greater problem.

So it is with us --- and sin and evil in the world ----- the real threat doesn't come from sin and evil itself --- because they will always be here --- and they are for God to deal with.

We must choose how we will interact with sin and evil in order to limit their influence in our lives.

Sin and evil will always be with us until Jesus returns ----- they aren't a threat they are a reality to be managed.

If we think we can eradicate sin we're doomed ---- only God can accomplish this in Christ.

Our focus must be on sharing to goodness and the light and love --- and saving forgiveness of Christ.

Canadian philosopher and theologian the late George Grant ---- when he was at McMaster University in Hamilton ----- was being interviewed in the 1960's and was asked --- "Dr. Grant some people think that communism will be the death of God. What do you think."

And George --- a great big bear of a man --- leaned back and laughed and said ----- "Well the communists may do a lot of things but they are not capable of killing God."

"Well the communists may do a lot of things but they are not capable of killing God." ---- there is a profound truth to this.

Evil may do a lot of things in life but it's never greater than God.

The weeds may cause a problem for the wheat farmer but they're not going to kill his crop.

God is forever before us --- within us --- all around us ----- nothing can ever block out the radiant beauty that is the reality of Christ.

Christ crucified --- Christ risen ---- and Christ ascended.

Christ saving and changing lives ----- and that is what we have to set our hearts and minds upon.

Verse 7 from our Psalm reading today ----- says --- "they go from strength to strength."

"They go from strength to strength." ----- that's precisely what we're called to do in Christ.

Stay positive --- focus on Christ unrelentingly --- and uncompromisingly.

The great American poet Emily Dickenson wrote ----- "dwell in possibility"

"Dwell in possibility."

That's what we do everyday as Christians.

We dwell in the possibilities of Christ.

That yes one day there may be peace in places like Gaza.

That yes one day there may be a cure for things like aids and cancer.

Because of course one day there will be --- even if that day is the end of time as we know it.

In the mean time we grow Christ --- we sew Christ ---- we live Christ.

We dwell in the possibilities that Christ might bring to fruition at any moment as God so sees fit.

And we do this knowing that Christ is truly the only “solution” ----- to all of the challenges and weeds in life.

And we do this knowing that the weeds are only ever temporary where He is eternal ---- and lasting ---- and final.

So stay positive.

Do better what you do best.

Dwell in the endless eternal possibilities of Christ.

Go from strength to strength.

Focus on the good crops --- the good news --- the goodness of Christ’s saving love.

Don’t allow yourself to be distracted.

God is good ----- God is faithful ----- and God is eternally just --- and true --- and final.

Amen.