



God Has Separation Anxiety--TouchPoint for July 15, 2020

Matthew 13:24-43 (MSG) ²⁴⁻²⁶ He told another story. “God’s kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. That night, while his hired men were asleep, his enemy sowed thistles all through the wheat and slipped away before dawn. When the first green shoots appeared and the grain began to form, the thistles showed up, too.

²⁷“The farmhands came to the farmer and said, ‘Master, that was clean seed you planted, wasn’t it? Where did these thistles come from?’ ²⁸“He answered, ‘Some enemy did this.’ “The farmhands asked, ‘Should we weed out the thistles?’ ²⁹⁻³⁰“He said, ‘No, if you weed the thistles, you’ll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time. Then I’ll instruct the harvesters to pull up the thistles and tie them in bundles for the fire, then gather the wheat and put it in the barn.’”

³⁶ Jesus dismissed the congregation and went into the house. His disciples came in and said, “Explain to us that story of the thistles in the field.” ³⁷⁻³⁹ So he explained. “The farmer who sows the pure seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the pure seeds are subjects of the kingdom, the thistles are subjects of the Devil, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, the curtain of history. The harvest hands are angels. ⁴⁰⁻⁴³ “The picture of thistles pulled up and burned is a scene from the final act. The Son of Man will send his angels, weed out the thistles from his kingdom, pitch them in the trash, and be done with them. They are going to complain to high heaven, but nobody is going to listen. At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of their Father. “Are you listening to this? Really listening?”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Let them grow together until the harvest.”

Let me be totally honest upfront. I love the parable; I hate the explanation. Can’t get around it. Can’t explain it away.

So let’s at least start with the parable. It is a parable of not separating. It is a parable of not thinking in either/or terms. It is about the grayness of life, the mixed up-ness of life. There are weeds and plants growing together. Nothing is clear cut. Which is exactly what the slaves want to do. CLEAR CUT.

And in this parable I hear so much of myself. My life is not either/or. It is more gray than not. I am both weeds and wheat all at the same time. You know, saint and sinner! Or maybe I’m not even the wheat or the weeds. Maybe I’m the ground that has both healing and brokenness growing out of it. Both have certainly been sown on the soil of my life. I have been the recipient of healing and brokenness. And I have also been the ground from which both healing and brokenness have come to those around me. I mean, if you ask someone

whether or not I have been a source of wheat or a source of weed in their life, you will get different answers. Especially if I've just come back from California, Colorado, or Oregon.

And it isn't just the plants or ground that I can relate to, but the slaves as well. They want to separate things out. Divide things. Classify things. I, too, am a slave to that. I like to classify, judge, decide. And I prefer to do it sooner than later. It saves time. After all, why wait to see how people will turn out? I prefer a snap judgement or a first impression.

And so, while I may have a poster in my home that reads, "Be patient, God isn't finished with me yet." ... You, on the other hand, are a done deal.

And isn't this the original temptation in the Garden of Eden. When the serpent says, "You will know good from evil." "You will be able to decide, choose, have the final say." It is what I live for, work for, study and reflect for...

So like the slaves, I am a slave to my own perception, my own world view, my own mindset. And that is why I need to hear the words of the householder. "Wait!!! Let them grow together until the harvest." And even then, the task is not left to the slaves, but to someone else, the harvesters.

Hmmm. It is never up to me.

And so, when I read the parable, I see myself as both wheat and weed. As ground that produces both healing and brokenness. And as an impatient, judgmental slave. Other than that, it is pretty clear cut! And I guess that is why I have so much trouble with the explanation--t lays it out in overly simplistic terms. And on top of that, it doesn't give me any hope. Because, if any and all, who have been an evildoer at some point in their life are ending up in hell, then there is no hope for me. Or you. None. Zero. Zip. Nada. If all we have is this explanation of how God works and nothing else. You and I are done for. Finished. History.

Because you see, if the wheat is wheat and the weeds are weeds. Nothing is ever going to change. Wheat doesn't become a weed, and a weed doesn't become wheat. If all we have is this explanation of how God works and nothing else. You and I are done for. Finished. History.

Which is why it is interesting to see where commentators take it. From conservative fundamentalists ... to liberal relativists ... no one stops with this passage. You can get out of the problem by either saying a special prayer, accepting Jesus, or slowly working on the process of sanctification. You know, "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better."

But each of these depends on us. We've got to do something to get us out of this mess. After all, these words are printed in red letters in some Bibles. And we all know red letters are more important than anything else. But let me ask you a question. Which is more important to you, what someone says, or what they do? Which tells you more about a person, their words or their actions?

So if a person tells a story of ultimate judgment, but when they hang on a cross they pronounce forgiveness, which has more meaning to you?

If a person tells a parable of judgment, but comes back after being tortured, spit on and executed, and speaks a word of peace and forgiveness ... which holds sway?

If a person talks of pain and eternal suffering, but spends his life ... forgiving a woman caught in adultery ... healing a demon filled gentile, living in a cemetery, surrounded by pigs ... and touching lepers and a woman with a blood flow.

Where do you fall? I mean, I think this parable, when combined with the rest of the Jesus story, holds a mirror up to us. Which of the Jesus stories grabs you? Which of the Jesus stories controls your heart, your soul, your spirit? I'm not interested in what you believe about the passage. None of us get to know. None of us get to decide. None of us has the final say. That's the whole point of the parable. And yes, even the explanation. It's all out of our hands.

So which part of this passage speaks to you? A parable of mixed up-ness. A parable of good and evil inextricably entwined ... which will eventually be separated out. Or the part about pain and suffering and judgment. And someone is going to get it. Someone is going to get what they deserve. And when we say that, we usually mean 'other people', not ourselves.

I'm not asking you to pick and choose. I'm asking you to tell me, make a confession, describe what is at the core of your faith life. What moves you to live and have your being within the Divine Mystery? Fear or forgiveness? Don't tell me what you think is the right answer. Tell me what your heart is saying. What your life is living.

Look, I'm not against judgment. I want it, as painful as it might be. I want the weeds of my life cleaned out. And I would hope they would be cleared out in this life and not just the next. I hope in the next life, as well as this one, the weeds and evil of my life will be consumed and separated from the good that is in me. I mean, I'm not looking for the authorities to do it, but I am looking to God to do it.

Isn't that what we mean when we pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God"?

And isn't that what I should want in my best friends. Those who can speak a word of judgment to me. Who can point out my failings and falling short. Not for the purpose of retribution but for reconciliation.

And what I want for myself, shouldn't I want that for the whole world? Shouldn't I treat the world the way I want to be treated? With patience and forbearance, understanding and grace. The long view rather than a knee jerk view.

Why is it we are so quick to solve the problems of the world by tearing things up, but ask God to be patient and gentle with us? Look, if we can't forgive the oppressor, we will become the oppressor. If all we are seeking in the end is to have the final word and power of retribution (tearing people up), we will become what we hate. And we will be pursuing an

insurrection and not a resurrection. If we win the battle of retribution, and nothing else, we will have lost our soul.

“Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.”

This doesn't mean you don't fight for persecution to end. It means you fight for the end of persecution in the other person and yourself. Maybe this is what Jesus is getting at in the parable when he says, *“Let both of them grow together...”* That we see that we are in this together. We all are a part of the same field. The same creation. And to tear up the other risks tearing up ourselves. And tearing into the other risks tearing into ourselves.

Apparently, in this world, at least, God has separation anxiety.

Maybe that's why in the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus didn't tear into his disciples. But gave them himself. So that they would grow together even in this night of denial, betrayal, and desertion.

There would be another time to sort it all out. But not this night. This night was for being together. All of them. The wheat and the tares. All being fed with the grace and forgiving mercy of their Abba.

This is what Jesus did, not just what he said. And maybe that should be in red letters.

Amen.