

19 July 2026, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 13.24–43 and Romans 8.12–25

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✠ May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in your sight O God my strength and my redeemer. **Amen.**

Last week we spoke about God sowing grace into the soil of our own hearts. And what the state of the soil is. This week we speak about the consequence of those seeds coming up, as the servants ask the owner: “Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?” and the owner, surprisingly, replies with, “No!... because, in gathering the weeds, you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest.”

That line is the clue to understanding today’s gospel.

“*Let both of them grow together*, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them”.

Jesus is talking about the existence of evil in the world, how God sowed a good creation, but others have sowed something else. The servants mess things up by trying to take the weeds before the harvest, because they end up taking some of the wheat with it. We, God’s servants, are now doing evil. And perhaps that is the real seed of evil in the first place, thinking that we can tell the difference between good and evil, and acting to purge it. That is what Matthew is talking about when he mentions Jesus revealing “what has been hidden *from the foundation of the world.*” (Mat 13: 35)

Whenever we respond to the evil in this world by trying to eradicate it too eagerly, we never fail to also kill the good along the way. Notice how, the one whom Jesus identifies as ‘enemy’, the devil, can simply walk away because the overeager servants finish the job for him. We have unwittingly participated in the evil. What a terrifying thought. What damage have we unknowingly caused, by our well-intentioned actions, to try and eradicate something we recognised as a potential evil? This is the question that Jesus bids us to ask of ourselves. This is what (as Jesus says at the beginning of the chapter) is so hard for us to see, and so hard for us to hear.

And it has apparently been that way *since the foundation of the world.* And indeed, we read as such in Genesis chapter 3, when the serpent addresses Eve saying, and I quote: “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, *and you will be like God*, knowing good and evil” (Gn. 3:4-5). In other words, the ‘enemy’ came to the first people in the garden and convinced them that they could know the difference between good and evil, convinced them that they

could know what God knows. Adam and Eve were just like the servants in this story, thinking they could recognise good from evil, a task that only the farmer can carry out at the harvest.

The leaders and the crowds who put Jesus to death weren't all bad people. They were well-meaning people like us, and like those servants who wanted to get rid of the weeds. Like Caiaphas, the chief high priest, who said before sentencing Jesus, "it is better for you to have one man die for the people, than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11: 50). He was really trying to save his field by pulling the weeds. But he got it wrong. And we get it wrong. We've always gotten it wrong, thinking that we could be like God, thinking that we know the difference between good and evil.

But, if we do finally get it, does this mean that we no longer have any response to evil? That's what Saint Paul is addressing in his letter to the Romans, as he speaks of the whole creation groaning in labour pains. What response to evil do we read there? Hope, says Paul. "For in hope we were saved" (Romans 8: 24).

But is hope enough? What does hope do? Well... there is a deeper understanding of hope, one which is less obvious, and certainly less attractive.

Paul says that if we are to be children of God, then we have to imitate God's child, his son Jesus Christ. To be like Christ, we also have to suffer with Christ. In other words... our response to evil is the same as Jesus': it begins by suffering with the victims of evil, by sharing their plight.¹ Hope is not sitting around waiting and doing nothing. Hope is sharing life with each other. True Hope means walking alongside and accompanying all people, wherever they are in life. To "Let both of them grow together until the harvest."

The point of these things being hidden from us, "from the foundation of the world" as Matthew says, is that we cannot possibly have our eyes opened to look at something so terrible about ourselves, unless we are already forgiven for it. This is why *Jesus* is revealing them to us in the gospel. And this is why the earlier threat, of our actions having already made the evil worse, is not the end of our hope.

Jesus ate with the tax collectors and sinners. But do not think that this is because he loved the sinner and hated the sin. No. It is about letting go of the idea of hatred all together. "Let both of them grow together until the harvest", says Jesus. That is our task. To grow together, regardless of who we may think is good and who we may think is evil.

¹ Most of the previous comments are ideas adapted from: Paul J. Nuechterlein, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Gerardian Lectionary, 1996.