

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

PSALTER: Psalms 112 & 113

1st LESSON: Habakkuk 1:12-2:4, 9-14

2nd LESSON: Matthew 13:24-30

Let Both Grow Together

"Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."

The tares were weeds which grew in the wheat fields. Their roots became entangled with the roots of the wheat, and it was almost impossible to tell them apart until the heads of the tares and the tops of the good grain formed and filled out. So, it was the practice to leave them all to grow together until the harvest. Then the heads of the tares could be cut off and burned; or after the grain was threshed, workers separated the grains of the tares from the wheat.

This parable deals with the problem of evil in the kingdom of heaven, and what should be done about this disturbing presence among God's people. Our Lord gives the answer: "Let them both grow together until the harvest," and then they will be separated. He tells us to trust the Lord of the harvest to make the final decision. We heard a passage today from the work of the prophet Habakkuk, who spoke at the time that the Babylonians invaded the Holy Land, carried many people into exile, and then in 586 B.C. destroyed Jerusalem. As he looked in anguish at what was happening to the chosen people, he could not refrain from asking God, "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (*Habakkuk 1:13*)

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In the answer that came to him, he did not say why this happened (though other prophets had often warned that the people's worship of idols and immoral behavior would bring God's judgment upon them). But he did state that the righteous would be vindicated, and that they must put their confidence in God, and remain faithful. He spoke of a "vision" that "awaits its time," a vision of the divine justice that would inevitably come; therefore, God's people must have faith in Him. He declared, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." (*Habakkuk 2:3-4*)

God appears to be ignoring all this evil that is coming upon His people, but this is not really the case. Instead, He also will be vindicated, because, says Habakkuk, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (*Habakkuk 2:14*)

Centuries later, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews took up this ancient prophet's theme of how the just will live. He urged his readers to have patience in the service of God and called for a faith that endures: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of those that believe to the saving of the soul." (*Hebrews 10:38-39*)

So we must trust the Lord in all things, Who said, "Let both grow together until the harvest." He not only admonished us to do this, but also set the example Himself in how He worked with His disciples. He knew for a long time that Judas was going to turn against Him, but He never expelled him from the circle of the Twelve. After the Feeding of the 5,000, and the long discussion about it the next day, many of Christ's followers left Him because they could not accept all that He said about Himself as the bread of God from heaven. Saint Peter pledged the disciples' loyalty to their Lord, but Christ replied, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Then Saint John explained,

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"He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him."
(*John 6:70-71*)

Much later, six days before His crucifixion, Jesus and the disciples were at a dinner in the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, at Bethany, a town near Jerusalem. During the meal, as Lazarus and his guests reclined at the table, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a costly ointment, or perfume. Judas protested her action, and asked, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" Christ rebuked him, and graciously accepted what Mary had done. The writer of the Fourth Gospel explained that Judas objected "not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it." (*John 12:1-8*)

Then, at the Last Supper, our Lord made this sorrowful prediction to His disciples, "One of you will betray me." When they asked who it would be, He replied, "He to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." Then He gave it to Judas, who later went out into the night to betray his Lord (*John 13:21-30*).

Judas' character and intentions were known for a long time, the but it was he who removed himself from the group of disciples. We have no record that the others in this fellowship tried to put him out, nor did they or the Lord think they were too good to associate with him. He Who will be Judge of all did not expel Judas, but followed His own teaching, "Let both grow together until the harvest."

What Jesus is telling us is that we must be cautious when it comes to discerning what is really good and what is really bad. We tend to be very quick to judge – certain that we know what in life ought to be preserved and what deserves to be destroyed.

But the parable suggests that we should not be so certain -- and not be too hasty to act on our imagined or perceived truths. God's overall plan and the working out of his purposes extend far beyond just what we can see in front of our noses.

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Even the most rigid people among us will have to admit that life shows us vast areas of gray. We cannot be absolutely sure about the meaning of everything that happens, or the effect of every idea anyone holds, or the final destiny of everyone we disagree with. Many times, it is difficult to even grasp the contents of our own hearts. In today's epistle, St. Paul applies the parable to our relationship to other people.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. “

He tells us that instead of being quick to weed, we should forgive, put up with what other people do, and strive for peace. We are all members of the same body – we are in this together.

If parts of the body are at war with one another, and not in harmony, then the whole body will be affected badly. In the Epistle it is suggested that “It is far better to sing hymns and read psalms together than to quarrel and hold grudges. Following both the command and the example of its Lord, the Christian fellowship is always to be loving and forgiving, and to leave judgment and division to God Almighty.

To the only wise God, our savior

Be glory, majesty, dominion and power

Both now and forever, Amen

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