

Matthew 13:24-30

On one hand ... on the other hand



The parable points out, in story form, that which we experience every day. Good and evil co-exist in the world – and it's not always easy to tell the difference between the two. Sometimes, they look remarkably alike!!

Nearly every day, we see the evidence of this co-existence of good and evil. On the one hand, we observe the tremendous outpouring of financial and labour support when an area experiences unexpected devastation; and countless numbers of people work tirelessly, faithfully for peace with justice; and incredibly wealthy people are quietly giving enormous support to discover medical cures for viral diseases, cancer, heart/stroke illnesses, spinal injuries; and the earth has an almost unbelievable ability to heal and replenish itself from environmental damage – to name only a few. On the other hand, all of us live daily under the threat that comes from power seeking leaders who initiate and foster wars, of terrorism, of natural disasters and of climate change/global warming – to name only a few.

Nearly every day, we see the evidence of the co-existence good and evil in others. On the one hand, there is a man who, fearing that emergency personnel wouldn't arrive in time, plunges into a smoke-filled home and rescues a mom and her four children; and there is the family who opens their hearts and provides help to a neighbour who is alone and needing support; and there is the volunteer who gives untold hours so that a much needed service is available to those who couldn't make it without them; and there are those who quietly assist with literacy programs and blood donor clinics and meals on wheels – to name only a very few. On the other hand, there is the one who sees something that s/he wants and simply takes it, even if it means hurting someone to get it; and there are those who will shove to get in line ahead of another and those who will squirrel away things others are in desperate need of, in case there should ever be a shortage; and there's the one who preys on the vulnerable and unsuspecting, often costing them 10s of thousands of dollars, or turning them into addicts, in order to have something they call power and position; and there are those who won't give anything of themselves because they're sure that someone will take advantage of them; and there are those who believe that unless they shoot first, someone will shoot them – to name only a very few.

Nearly every day, if we have the courage and take the time to look inside, we see evidence of the co-existence of good and evil in ourselves. The apostle Paul says it simply and eloquently – for himself, but also for every one of us. He says that the good he longs to do, that he intends to do, he doesn't always/often do. And the evil, the bad he strives not to do, determines he'll never do, he does. On the one hand, there are times, when despite fatigue, we go the extra mile for someone; and times when we can ill afford to be generous, but we know someone else's need is at least as great as our own; and times when someone hurts us and we make the first and maybe second and third attempts to reconcile; and times when we turn the other cheek; and times when we defend someone of whom others are speaking or even treating badly; even times when we insist that another take the last available whatever, even though we were there first. On the other hand, we can just as easily be selfish, self-centred, thoughtless, grudge bearing, gossiping, smug, vengeful, heartless creatures – on a bad day!

One might say that wheat and weeds grow together – in our world, in the hearts of others, and in our own lives. And despite the fact that most of the examples I've shared are fairly clear on which is good and which is evil, there are many times when the line between the two is very fine indeed. All too often, it is easy to justify the presence and maybe even the necessity of weeds. All too often, the good we may have intended causes hurt and brokenness.

So what should we do? Evil, in whatever form, begets fear, doesn't it? So how should we respond? In the face of the global threats, should we hide our heads under the covers? Put up walls to hide behind? Shoot first, in case we get shot? In face of possible threats from others, should we trust no one, ever? Judge and condemn everything and everyone as all bad? With the realization that we aren't always the people we would like to be, we would like others to think we are, should we give up on trying to be salt of the earth, yeast in the leaven – take refuge in that amusing, but tempting attitude of Maude's and declare to all and ourselves that "the devil made me do it?"

One reaction to the fear is to build up fortresses, walls to keep as much of life away as possible. Another reaction is to find hope in God and place our trust completely in God.

The apostle Paul, while acknowledging "the sufferings of this present time" [Romans 8:18] calls us to live our lives "on tiptoe", in anticipation of the miracles and grace that God is settling on us every day. You see, if we choose to respond to all that life hands us, including the admission that not only is there evil in the world, not only do others do evil things, but that there is in each of us a dark side out of which we fail to do the good we know and instead do the evil we want not to do – if we choose to respond trusting the God who made us, who knows every bit of us from the moment of conception, the God who forgives us and loves us, the God who sees the "wheat" in us despite the "weeds" – if we choose to trust this God and place our hope and faith in Him, then we will approach the world, one another and even ourselves quite differently than we will if fear takes over. We will live, not with blinders or rose coloured glasses, but with a surety about whose world this is and who is Lord of this world. We will treat one another, the planet/universe - our home - and even ourselves differently. We will live expectantly, joyfully and carefully – not the carefully that is born of trepidation; but rather the carefully that is full of caring and compassion, tenderness and respect.

How different would our lives be if we stopped suspecting one another, quit competing with one another as though there's only so much blessing to go around; if we decided never to condemn or exclude the other? What, I wonder, would happen?

There is much that is good and much that is evil in our world; much that is reliable and much that is frightening, terrifying even. However, when we know we are God's child, joint heirs with Jesus, we see things differently. We live expectantly, watching for God's Spirit at work in the world, knowing that only God rules. We decide to live first and always for God - obedient, gracious, loving, forgiving, compassionate, passionate - showing others God's presence in their lives, God's unconditional love for them. And when we fail to live up to the best in us, we make the decision all over again, knowing that God has forgiven us, continues to love us and is still at work in us and through us.