

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Too Soon to Tell
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
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*Lord, open my eyes to behold your glory, open my lips to sing your praise,
open my heart to love your people. Amen.*

Once upon a time...A farmer had only one horse. One day, his horse ran away.

All the neighbors came by saying, "I'm so sorry. This is such bad news. You must be so upset."

The man just said, "We'll see."

A few days later, his horse came back with twenty wild horses. The man and his son corralled all 21 horses. All the neighbors came by saying, "Congratulations! This is such good news. You must be so happy!" The man just said, "We'll see."

One of the wild horses kicked the man's only son, breaking both his legs. All the neighbors came by saying, "I'm so sorry. This is such bad news. You must be so upset." The man just said, "We'll see."

The country went to war, and every able-bodied young man was drafted to fight. The war was terrible and killed every young man, but the farmer's son was spared, since his broken legs prevented him from being drafted. All the neighbors came by saying, "Congratulations! This is such good news. You must be so happy!" The man just said, "We'll see. It's too soon to tell."

I imagine there are even longer versions of this fable. I love it because it is such a simple reminder of the perils of judging too quickly. It doesn't even have a punch line or clear resolution! And I believe that is part of the message from today's parable of the wheat and the tares. We must not judge too quickly.

This parable fascinates me because it is not nearly as well known as the one we heard last week, the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, or of the Soil, as some suggest. Both are parables about the process of planting and seeing what comes to fruit. Both are meant to tell us something about the way God works and perhaps about ourselves as well. Last week the focus was on the soil – how we hear the word of God, what to do with it, and how to be faithful disciples.

Today we have both good and bad seed, and they grow together, and become entwined, difficult to sort out one from the other, at least at first. We don't know this parable as well. And we don't know how to interpret it. In fact, our Gospel account from Matthew has an explanation all added in, just for the disciples, and us. That explanation may or may not have been actually spoken by Jesus. Probably not. Many believe it was added later by the early Church as a way to nail down the meaning of Jesus' words – to be very clear about what was meant in light of their context. The problem with turning a parable – a simple story told with everyday items to convey meaning

about eternal issues – a story told to make people think, to have to unfold the layers, consider the angles, -- the problem with turning something so rich as a parable into an allegory, where each item stands directly for something or someone in the real world – is that it jumps too quickly to judgment and doesn't allow us room to squirm, wondering who we might be in the parable today.

And that is the real reason this parable fascinates me - because when we hear it, we have a tendency to do exactly what it instructs us NOT to do. We rush to the ending and focus on how best to judge the good and the evil. We consider who in the church or the world are the weeds, and secretly hope that we will be judged to be wheat. We rush to judge.

But God tells us (again and again) that it is too soon to tell. Like the man in the fable, wiser than any of his neighbors, we are to withhold judgment. The message about judgment in this parable is two-fold: 1) God is the judge, not us; 2) judgment will come in God's time, not ours. Although this does not come naturally to us, we can certainly admit that the message is a familiar one. Over and over again, we are told that our job is to be faithful, and that God alone will judge the just and the unjust.

So perhaps the consent to the election and consecration of Gene Robinson, a gay man in a committed relationship, to the order of Bishop was a day of freedom and justice for the Church. Or perhaps it was the nail in the coffin of yet another mainline denomination. Too soon to tell. Perhaps the Tea Party stance on no new taxes is the beginning of economic recovery and government responsibility for the country. Or perhaps it is the one more opportunity for the gap between rich and poor to grow. We'll see. Perhaps our neighbor's loud yard parties will lower property values on our street, or perhaps they will be the beginning of a new sense of community in the neighborhood. Too soon to tell.

And so what are we to do in the meantime? What does being faithful look like? Well, this answer shouldn't be surprising either. We are to live together in love. Embracing diversity. Admitting that none of us has achieved perfection or has seen the whole picture. We are to be in community with one another – all different kinds called together in divine love. We are to embrace the other – the other in ourselves, for each of us has some wheat and some weeds in us, and to embrace others among us who look or think or act differently.

God calls us into community - into a space safe enough to be ourselves – into a group which brings out the best in each of us, while swiftly forgiving the faults and foibles we all have.

The church is to be this kind of community where the good in people thrives and the bad is forgiven. Too often the church has gotten caught up in the business of separating people into

groups and judging those who seem different. But God calls us to love one another without judgment.

Each of us has experienced this kind of unconditional love. Each of us has participated in sharing that love with others. Perhaps it was as part of hosting the recent Pilgrimage from South Africa, as we spent 2 weeks strengthening our partnerships and celebrating our unity despite our differences. Maybe it was as a representative to Greater Cleveland Congregations or the recent community discussions about youth and flashmobs and curfews in Cleveland Heights. Maybe it was as recently as this past weekend, when alums from Youth Group came together to reunite, remember, and honor a special woman who lives unconditional love every day. Or perhaps it comes later this week, as members of St. Paul's, St. Luke's and Open Doors After-School program travel to Kentucky to live in community and share in the rebuilding of people's homes – as an act of love.

What makes this unconditional love possible? Knowing who we are. We are God's beloved. Our knowledge and acceptance of God's love for us is what makes it possible for us to love others. And being the church – living in community helps us know we are beloved.

We are meant to be together – to live in love, to bring out the best in one another, to withhold judgment and to love unconditionally. Who are the weeds amongst us? God alone will be the judge, in God's own time. For now, it's too soon to tell. Amen.