

Sermon: Proper 11A

Title: Patience in God's Timing

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord.

We, humanity, are impatient. We want things done on our time, when we want, how we want, without any thought or care about anything else. And society has taught us that this is okay and acceptable. Want a new phone? Go out and purchase one. Need something sweet to eat? Run to the store and grab something. Want a bigger, better car, house, boat? Grab a loan and go purchase one.

We are people who love instant gratification, so much so that we lose sight of what it means to be patient. Yet, as people of faith, we also believe in God's timing. Things will be done in God's perfect timing...if it lines up with ours.

But here is the thing, rarely does God's timing line up with our own. Yet it is God's timing that should be followed. Which is one of the meanings in today's parable about the wheat and the weeds. God can be patient because God can see the big picture, often when we cannot.

A farmer goes out and plants a field of wheat. Then in the night an enemy shows up and plants a bunch of weeds. The farm hands want to pull the weeds, but the farmer knows that if they pull the weeds, they will end up endangering and/or pulling out the entire wheat harvest. The best solution is to sit and wait. The farmer can see the bigger picture, even if the farm hands cannot.

God can see the bigger picture in our lives, even if, and when, we cannot.

Much like most of the themes throughout the Bible, this is not a new theme. Think with me for a moment about the story of Joseph. You know the one. Joseph has eleven brothers and is the second youngest of Jacob's children. Joseph is the favorite son, therefore receiving special treatment. His brothers finally had enough and sold him into slavery. Through God's timing, Joseph is eventually freed from prison, is Pharaoh's secondhand man, and saves Israel from the plague. And in Genesis 50, as Joseph's story ends, we hear the following:

Joseph said to them: 'Do not be afraid!' Am I in the place of God? Even though you [my brothers] intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.'

God could see the bigger picture in Joseph's life, even if Joseph or his brothers were not able to. God's patience in the bigger picture, much like the farmer from our Gospel, allows for a

plentiful harvest. God's ability to see the bigger picture allows for the wheat to grow and be harvested, even when the weeds grow right alongside the wheat.

God urges us to be patient, to allow God's timing to win the day. James 5 says the following:

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!

Because that is the other thing, isn't it? It is not about just being patient with God's timing; it is also about being patient with weeds. And not casting judgment on our fellow neighbors.

Like we hear in James, we are quick to judge our neighbor. We want to be the one to exact judgment on each other, to pluck out the weeds. We think we know best. But what we hear both from James and from our parable this morning is that we do not know what is best. We cannot see the bigger picture, so we in fact do not know what is weed versus wheat. Like the farm hands, we cannot always tell the difference between weeds and wheat.

If left to our own devices, if left with our own willingness to judge one another, we will end up ruining the harvest. Just like the farm hands from our gospel today.

I am not a gardener (see last week's sermon). I have experienced this parable firsthand. Everything that is green to me looks like a viable plant. There is not much difference between plants and weed. One night many years ago I was helping a friend of mine in her garden. She showed me what to pluck, what clearly were weeds. I was just plucking weeds moving right along when she looked back and told me to stop because I was pulling out the vegetables. I was plucking live healthy plants because I thought they were weeds. I ended up doing more damage to her garden than what was helpful. Because to me, everything that is green looks the same.

In our Gospel today the weeds that are planted alongside the wheat are called darnel. And the tricky thing about darnel is that until the harvest, the darnel weed looks almost identical to wheat. So, if the farm hands were going to pluck out the darnel, they would have ended up plucking out healthy wheat at the same time. Much like I did when I was helping my friend garden all those years ago. This is why the farm hands had to listen to the farmer. Only the farmer could see the bigger picture.

Only God can see the bigger picture. Only God's patience and timing allows for a plentiful harvest. If we were to cast judgment, much like me as a gardener, we would cause more damage than good.

We need God's perspective in the world.

There is an old Sunday school story. A Sunday school teacher once asked their class: If good guys wear green hats and bad guys wear red hats, what color hat would you be wearing? One little boy answered, my hat would be striped!

Isn't that the case though? We all have weeds in our own lives, in our own heart. We are not fully wheat; the weeds grow right alongside our own wheat. As Martin Luther eloquently put it, we are at the same time both sinner and saint. We have both weeds and wheat that grow in our lives, in our hearts, and through our actions.

We need God's perspective in the world because we too will be judged. Paul says, in his letter to the church in Corinth, God is the only one who can burn all the weeds. We need to wait for God's timing on the day of judgment.

Just like the farmer told the farm hands, we cannot pluck the weeds until the time of harvest. God will judge all of us, as the Apostles' Creed says, the living and the dead.

Yet...

Yet we will all survive the judgment because unlike humans, God's judgment is a judgment of grace. God will burn away all the weeds, all the dandelion, all the hateful things we do as humans, and we will survive.

The only person who can be trusted with judgment is God. We will not be destroyed by God's judgment, just the awful parts of humanity that are within our hearts. Sinner and saint living side by side within our hearts.

At the time of harvest, God will pluck the weeds from our hearts, so all we are left with is God's intended beautiful creation, filled with love, joy, peace, and patience. God will harvest our hearts and leave all the good things behind. We will come through judgment day as beloved children of God, with no more weeds, no more sinner, within us.

Until that time. We are thankful when people offer us patience. When we are not judged too harshly for the mistakes we make, when the weeds tend to overtake our lives. We are grateful for patience in the world. We need to make sure we are offering the same patience to those we meet on a regular basis. If we all had a little more patience, more wheat would shine through than weeds.

Siblings in Christ, remember that God's timing is always the best, even when it is hard to live within. You are thankful when people offer you patience, not plucking the weeds from within you, it is time we offer a little more patience in the world. Take a page out of God's book, quite literally, and leave the judgment to God and offer patience to one another. Only God can see the full picture, and God's timing and ability to work within that picture is always perfect. Rely on God for patience, allow the wheat and weeds to grow side by side, and let the farmer do their thing. The harvest will be plentiful when the day comes. Amen.