

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

18 July 2020

Christ Church

The 13<sup>th</sup> Century Islamic Scholar/poet, and Sufi Mystic Rumi once wrote:

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweep your house,  
Empty its furniture.  
Still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
For some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice  
Meet them at the door laughing.  
Be grateful for whatever comes  
Because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond.

Rumi's wisdom compels us to accept everything that is – even those things which we deem unacceptable. This is the wisdom of the mindful life. Accept the bad with the good, welcoming them both as teachers.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his followers another parable about seeds and growing things. The Evil One comes along and sews weeds among the wheat. The disciples ask Jesus, "Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds? And he responds, "In gathering the weeds, you will uproot the wheat. Let them grow together until the harvest."

The world of Matthew's Gospel is deeply troubled. There are many competing teachers, with competing and compelling messages – no one knows what to believe any more. Should we remain faithful to the letter of the Ancient Hebrew Law, or should we follow Jesus, who challenges the way the Law is practiced? And, how do we protect ourselves from the Romans? It's a complex, troubling, fearful time.

Sound familiar?

Should we trust our scientists, or the officials we've elected? Should we wear masks, or do what feels comfortable to us? Should we welcome the refugee, or set strident limits to protect our country? Should we take down the monuments of Southern history, or amend them to explain their context? Should we act deliberately for the good of the environment, or make economic prosperity our first priority?

Human beings face battles in every generation. As Jesus tells us today, the weeds and the good seeds grow together. So, we are left with the challenge of discerning for ourselves how we will respond.

It's not always easy to discern who is good and who is evil. Jesus' parable suggests that we can't always be sure which is which. By trying to dispose of the unfaithful, we might be disposing of the faithful as well. And finally, it is not ours to make that call. Judging other people – other children of God – is a judgment for God alone to make.

On Friday, we lost two remarkable leaders of our generation: C. T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis. Both of these men suffered humiliation, discrimination, and physical violence for no other reason than the skin color God chose to give them.

Both men had good reasons to be angry – to want to destroy the weeds that choked their lives. But they both chose the path of non-violence.

Rather than obliterate those who oppressed them – violently yanking the weeds from among the wheat – they courageously walked in their truth, as Christ did: leaving judgment to God.

C. T. Vivian, though lesser-known, was a Civil Rights organizer and advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He once wrote, "Non-violence is the only honorable way of dealing with social change, because if we are wrong, nobody gets hurt but us; and if we are right, more people will participate in determining their own destiny."

John Lewis, son of a share-cropper in Alabama, worked as a Congressman for decades for the cause of justice. My husband David and my son John had the privilege of interviewing John Lewis several years ago. They also produced a short film about him, narrated by Tom Glenn, head of a prominent charitable foundation. I'd like to share it with you now.

(Have Glen play film)

John Lewis once wrote, "Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part. ... If we believe in the change we seek, then it is easy to commit to doing all we can, because the responsibility is ours alone to build a better society and more peaceful world."

Let us be thankful for the totality of our lives, the good and the bad – and let them be our teachers.