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Squamish United Church

July 17, 2011

Scripture Readings

Genesis 28:10-19a

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### **Nurture the Wheat**

So it was my turn this week to begin pre-marital counseling. And one of the first things I was reminded of with regards to my personality is that my greatest strength and weakness is that I tend to be a dreamer. It's a strength because I can almost always find the good in someone and something and I also will always see the potential for something more and better. I rarely give up on anyone or anything. The dark side of that is I always want something more and better, I am never completely satisfied - I am always striving for more and I find it hard to be 'just content.'

So it probably won't surprise you that when the first scripture I read this week was about a dream I was drawn to it. Jacob the dreamer is someone I can relate to. I know I'm not alone I think most of us have a life dream at some point in time.

Life dreams are the things that make us get up in the morning. They are what we are after in life. Dreams drive us to leave our parents homes, get educations and jobs and even leave the cities we grew up in and after that move from one year to another. We may not know exactly what our dreams are but they still run our lives.

A dream is what led you into one relationship and out of another. Every important decision you have made in life has been determined by how close it gets you to the dream. However one of the problems in life is that the dream keeps moving. That is why if we look at his life we understand Jacob very well. His story lines up with real life for most of us.

"Now some people appear to have lives that are naturally dream-like. That is the story of Esau who is Jacob's older brother. Esau drives *most of us* crazy. He stumbles into everything the rest of us of are working so hard to achieve, and he takes it all for granted. When we look at all of his prosperity, popularity, his great prospects-well, we know that some people are just born right.

Jacobs story describes how life is for those of us who were not born lucky, but are still determined to make something of our lives. Because some people have it made, and others of us have to make it happen. *Most of us* are in the second group. Believing that nothing is naturally

coming our way, we are determined to go out and make our dreams come true. And as Jacob will illustrate for us, that is the best way in the world to really mess up your life.

You see, when it comes to dreams, the good ones come from God. And God insists on just giving them to us. The most important dreams are things like being loved, having a child, beholding beauty, discovering your purpose in life, finding joy in your work, or finding a friend who will stick with you through anything, even the truth. Those dreams, the things for which we yearn most in life, come only as blessings from God. And blessings can only be received.

There is, however, one thing we can do to prevent ourselves from enjoying these sacred gifts. We can insist on getting them for ourselves. That is the great flaw in Jacob's life. And my life. And maybe yours also. We keep trying to achieve what we can only receive as a gift.”<sup>1</sup> We lose sight of the things that God has given us or we attempt to fix the world on our own. We strive so hard to make our lives and the lives of those around us fall into perfect place that we forget that we have a creator who has given to us great things. And soon rather than striving for what is good we lose focus of the purpose of our being and can actually forget who we were created to be. We can find ourselves focusing on all the things we don't have and missing out on the things we do. Or we find ourselves only seeing the evil in and around us and ignoring the blessings, grace and love.

The Rev. Ken Kesselus, wrote “In a classic strip of the famed “Peanuts” newspaper cartoon, Lucy explains to her little brother Linus about the existence of good and evil. She tells him that he, like others, have inside these two forces. Linus looks at his stomach with a distressed look on his face and declares, “I can feel them in there fighting.” Humorous, but true.”<sup>2</sup>

In today's gospel, we find Jesus telling a parable that uses a similar image – good wheat and evil weeds, fighting it out in a farmer's field. It is the story of every good superhero and action film. It's what we read about in the newspaper, it's what we gossip about with our friends. Who's good? Who's evil? What's good? What's evil? We often forget how intertwined it is even in our own lives. There is somehow a force out there that seems to work against good and grace and love.

“There is a force that seeks to destroy the loving nature of creation. There is a force that exerts every effort to suck the lifeblood out of everything that promotes prosperity and health and hope and peace and joy. Throughout the ages, the faithful have personified this sinister force by many names: Satan, the devil, Beelzebub, Lucifer, or “the evil one.” By whatever designation we choose, its intent, its nature, is to un-make what God has created and to deface, distort, and destroy whatever good it may latch onto, as it eats away at it with parasitic intensity.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dr. M. Craig Barnes The All-American Dreamer July 20, 2008

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Ken Kesselus, July 17, 2011 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 11

Through today's parable, Jesus gives us an illustration of the power of the evil force that can invade every aspect of life. He makes this clear by painting a picture of weeds growing alongside wheat, imitating the good grain and intertwining its roots and growth with what was planted by the farmer, who stands for Christ. And how did the weeds get into the field? Jesus says simply that the weeds came from an enemy, the devil, the evil one."<sup>3</sup>

Evil, or something that turns us away from God is as good an explanation I can give to this force we find around and within us. Our lives develop with evil and goodness intertwined. We may always have intent to do what is right but along with every biblical character we know at times we get it very wrong. In Romans 7:15 the apostle Paul writes "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." What if we recognized that ever other person we encounter has the same struggle.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." And how can true concern flourish without realizing we're all in this together? Our roots inexorably tangled, "whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

Conventional good guy/bad guy interpretations of this parable limits the possibilities of continual conversion, reconciliation, maturing in faith and compassion. Rather, let the tares represent all that is within the human character that stifles solidarity with life on this fragile planet.

Again, to quote from King, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."<sup>4</sup> I think that is what Jesus is trying to say when the farmer insists that we wait until harvest rather than just ripping out the weeds. When we rip out the weeds we most likely will destroy the wheat in the process. Often when a problem or crisis begins and we react too quickly we ruin something that is good. Because evil is strongest when it disguises itself as good.

We know this don't we. How often do we regret acting too quickly or making judgment without all the information processed. I am an introvert (believe it or not) which for me means I rarely react really quickly to a crisis - I have to process things through before I am willing to make a decision. But when things are hot I'm just as human as the rest and the stress can over come and I want to root out the evil immediately. When we do that to people (root them out that is) often we fail to give them the opportunity for growth, grace and love. We forget last weeks story of the abundant God who lavishly sows seeds of goodness, love and grace even in the places where we see no hope. Kesselus puts it this way Jesus is telling us to "leave the judging until later, to recognize that throwing the weeds into the fire is God's job, not ours. When we encounter what

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<sup>3</sup> IBID

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/proper11a.html>

we see as evil, we want to find the source and destroy it. We often are impelled by the false wisdom of, “Don’t just stand there, do something!” But as he so often does, Jesus uses this parable to make us rethink our human reactions, and he turns us in an opposite direction by having the owner say, in effect, “Don’t just do something, stand there!” Wait to let the nature of the godly prosper and prevail in due course. Profoundly, Jesus is leading us to cease chasing after the bad, and rather concentrate on the good.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps these lectionary passages land in the same week because we are being reminded that God is in every place. Like Jacob if we open our eyes from our dream like state of a perfect world we might actually find ourselves in a similar situation. When “Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” 17And *Jacob* was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” Jacob found himself building a monument of thanksgiving to The Holy is a place and time when he was wrestling to see the existence of God in the first place.

Jesus reminds us that God is in all things and all places. Our job is recognize, acknowledge, hold up, be and appreciate the goodness and love rather than focus on the evil. “Jesus is saying to us that we can relax in knowing that we don’t have to be in the judging business or in the business of destroying that which would work against God, because the owner of the farm, God himself, will make it all come out right in the end.”<sup>6</sup>

So perhaps today we are being called to spend less time focusing on the weeds and more time focusing on the wheat. How much better would life be if we focused on and lived out of love and grace first. This week let’s spend some time tending the wheat and fostering growth in places that we perhaps have been focusing on the weeds and death.

“Like Linus of the Peanuts cartoon, we certainly recognize in ourselves and in the complex workings of the world in which we live the conflict that Linus experienced as a fist fight in his gut. Yet in the unlikely teaching of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus leaves us with a counterintuitive approach to dealing with this anxiety.” Unless we know we can offer life through righteous anger or judgment let us focus on nurturing the goodness and love. In a world that focuses on fear and hatred let us offer hope and freedom and love. Even in the darkest and most difficult circumstances God is there, and we have opportunity to make God seen. It might seem impossible but what if we were to look at the lives that chose to live this way?

We know it’s possible from the examples of the lives of people like Jesus, Mother Theresa, Bonhoffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Terry Fox, and the list goes on. Each of these chose to nurture the wheat. Even to the point of death these people offered love in the face of evil. And their lives live on because of that fact alone. To discover the power of the

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<sup>5</sup> Kesselus

<sup>6</sup> IBID

“resurrection proves the truth of the parable of the wheat and weeds.” It is a counter cultural response. It is a response we will have to work through each moment of our lives. Jesus said “I have come that all might have life and have it abundantly” may we choose to nurture every space on this earth so that God’s kindom may come here in our lives.