

Jesus disappoints again  
[written in oral style]

Gordon Allaby

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8:19

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FINALLY, we have some fire and brimstone!  
This, of course, includes weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We rarely proclaim this juicy stuff.

Judgment – bad guys getting punished. They are gathered and burned. Those weeds get destroyed.

I can easily list a lot of weeds. They would include racists, rapists, abusers, murderers, and despicable, power-hungry politicians. One former leader really gets under my skin.

Oh, and I will toss in phone scammers. They irate me, too.

Punishment does have a certain appeal to it, and so does the concept of redemptive violence.  
Good guys killing bad guys.  
??????? Wait. *Would not killing make a good guy bad???*

A world without corruption, greed, and destruction, a world without evil sure sounds nice.  
Imagine,.....no threats.

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Jesus' disciples were receiving more and more threats against them and Jesus.  
I wonder if they thought, "Hey, Jesus can fix a lame person. Maybe he could reverse that by making our enemies lame?"  
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So, Jesus told another parable, saying, this one "may" be compared to God's way of being/living.

Jesus said, someone, who we know is God's agent, Jesus, sowed good seeds. In the parable they were wheat seeds.  
Soon, it was discovered that weeds were growing in with the wheat.  
This problem was not the good farmer's fault; that is made clear. So, an enemy, a bad-guy, must have done it.

The result is good guys and bad guys are all mixed together.

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Fascinating how "other" people tend to be the weeds. ???  
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Moreover, defining enemy is problematic, too.

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When I moved to rural Kansas, I wanted to improve the lawn around the house.

Being unfamiliar with what type of grass grows best there, I asked someone in the church. He was a farmer.

He made a couple of suggestions, and then firmly said, "DO NOT use Ryegrass."

He answered my "why" with, "Ryegrass easily spreads into the fields and our herbicides cannot kill it. It is too similar to wheat.

If I had unknowingly sowed ryegrass, I would have been considered an enemy. Interesting.

Nevertheless, the enemy / the evil one is not the focal point. We must not let that element distract us.

Also, as much as it is appealing, Judgment is not a factor either.

Yes, Jesus presented in the parable the aspect of sorting, of judgment and consequences.

However, please note it happens at the end of the age—at the end of time.

Good grief, that is truly a long wait. That remoteness makes it irrelevant beyond a tacit nod to eventual accountability.

If the disciples had wanted some vengeance against their enemies, then they would have been extremely disappointed in Jesus.

Likewise, we will be disappointed in Jesus' lesson if we desire wrath / punishment to our enemies.

Subsequently, we are left with the haunting question,  
**Why** does an all good and all-powerful God tolerate corruption and evil?

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I asked that very question to one of my theology professors. He replied, "If an all-powerful and purely all good God were to engage in the world to illuminate evil, then it would be thorough and complete." In essence, it would bring forth the end of time.

I quickly examined myself, and easily concluded that I did not want that. I would not fair so well.

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Today's parable states the same thing, but in a gentler manner. Uprooting the weeds would also uproot the wheat, killing them both. In other words, all would die. Same conclusion.

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Obviously, the reality presented is that the wheat and the weeds live together. And, that is true. That is our reality, but there is more to this.

The word for weed is “zizania”. Zizania is bearded darnel.  
Bearded darnel looks just like wheat.  
They look the same.

However, when they are ready for harvest, the wheat turns brown and the darnel turns black in colour.  
Another reason to wait.

Moreover, the wheat seeds are nourishing. The darnel seeds are poisonous. That is significant.

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So, note the following:

The wheat and the weeds look the same. They cannot be evaluated, judged, and separated.

This is the present tense.

They live together, sharing the same resources.

We cannot separate. We think we can judge, but it is actually an act of demeaning, projection.  
No matter our desire to divide good from bad, we cannot.

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I like to quote Richard Rohr because he tends to agree with me. This is a long citation, but I think he says it well.

*If our egos are still in charge, we will find a “disposable” person or group on which to project our problems.*

*People who have not come to at least a minimal awareness of their own shadow side will always find someone else to hate, fear, and exclude.*

*Hatred holds a group together much more quickly and easily than love and inclusivity; I am sorry to say.*

*Sadly, the history of violence and the history of religion are almost the same history. When religion remains at an immature level, it tends to create very violent people who entrench themselves on the side of the good, the worthy, the pure, the saved. They project all their evil somewhere else and attack it over there.*

*Something has to be sacrificed. Blood has to be shed. Someone has to be blamed, attacked, tortured, imprisoned, or killed. Sacrificial systems create religions and governments of exclusion and violence.*

*Yet Jesus taught and modeled inclusivity and forgiveness!*

*As long as we try to deal with evil by some other means than forgiveness, we will never experience the real meaning of evil and sin.*

*We will keep projecting, fearing, and attacking it over there, instead of “gazing” on it within ourselves and weeping over it.*

*The longer we gaze, the more we will see our own complicity in and profitability from the sin of others.*

*Forgiveness demands three new simultaneous “seeings”:*

*I must see God in the other,*

*I must access God in myself, and I must experience God in a new way that is larger than an “Enforcer.”*

End of quote.

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In verse 30, Jesus said, “Let both of them grow together...”

I would guess that the disciples would have been disappointed by this instruction.

A crusader destroying the bad guys sure seems preferable.  
Yet, destruction, punishment, and killing are not good things.  
If anything, they are evil.

Perhaps, in the end of time, we will understand the harvest.  
However, for now, we live in the present.  
And, Jesus taught in the parable that we all live together.

Moreover, we may be disappointed to know that this means much more than merely tolerating those who are different, those who irritate us, and those who **we** are afraid of.

In the parable, the roots of the weeds and wheat were intertwined and they shared the same resources.

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What does this mean?

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Well, first contemplate the ways we separate ourselves.

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This can be uncomfortable as it challenges our precious concept of Mennonite community.

Integration, living intertwined, takes effort and hard work.  
Jesus went out of his way to commune with the outcasts.

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In addition, this parable is not about predestination.

It does not advance the notion that some are born good and some bad.

God created / planted a world of good, but **then, later**, evil injected its corruption and destruction.

And, that is how things are.

Critical to this message is knowing how kingdom living / living God’s way is identified.  
Living / being God’s way is bearing good fruit—being the nourishing seed.

It is being Christ-like.

We are to live, flower, bring wonder, nourishment, beauty, healing, and hope to the world.

We are to thrive in God's way, in spite of the weeds around us and in us.

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I'll end with a story adapted from Loren Eiseley's story from 1969.

A professor was taking his sabbatical in a rented beach house on the Florida gulf coast.

He made a habit of walking the beach each morning before he began his work. Often, he was shocked to see litter, yet he would sometimes take a beautiful shell, killing the sea creatures that lived inside it.

One day he was walking along the shore. As he looked down the beach, he saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself to think of someone who would dance to the day.

So, he began to walk faster to catch up. As he got closer, he saw that it was a young man and the young man was not dancing, but instead he was reaching down to the shore, picking up something and very gently throwing it into the ocean. [ Demonstrate throwing starfish ]

As he got closer, he called out, "Good morning! What are you doing?" The young man paused, looked up and replied, "Throwing starfish into the ocean." [ ]

"I guess I should have asked, "Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?"  
"The sun is up and the tide is going out. And if I don't throw them in, they'll die."  
"But young man, don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it. You can not possibly make a difference!"  
The young man listened politely. Then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves. "It made a difference for that one!" [ ]

His response surprised the professor. He was upset. He did not know how to reply. So instead, he turned away and walked back to the cottage to begin his writings.

All day long as he wrote, the image of the young man haunted him. He tried to ignore it, but the vision persisted.

Finally, late in the afternoon he realized that he, the scientist, had missed out on the essential nature of the young man's actions. Because he realized that what the young man was doing was choosing not to be an observer in the universe and watch it pass by. But was choosing to be an actor in the universe and make a difference.

He was embarrassed.

That night he went to bed troubled.  
When the morning came, he awoke knowing that he had to do something.  
So, he got up, put on his clothes, went to the beach and found the young man. And with him,  
he spent the rest of the morning throwing starfish into the ocean. [ ]

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The young man's actions represent something that is special in each and every one of us.  
We have all been gifted with the ability to make a difference for good. The wheat seed.

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Romans 8:19

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God."

God leads us to bring healing and hope to the hurting world.

Finally, let us remember the Gospel miracle.  
There is redemption and transformation.  
Call it rebirth, if you like.

The weeds can become wheat.  
This has nothing to do with religion or doctrine.  
It is about living and being God's way.

[ ] Splash.