



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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“Fruit of the Spirit: Generosity” -The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - 7/19/2020

[Lessons for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost](#)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We are continuing over the summer this excellent series over the Fruit of the Spirit that is found in the book of Galatians by the writer, Paul. These are things that exist in us as Christians, because we've been given the spirit of God and they help us, especially in these uncertain and ambiguous times, they help us to build resiliency and to be faithful in the midst of so much unknowing.

We have covered love, joy, patience, peace, and kindness. And now we're moving into generosity. So generosity seems like an easy one for Christians, right? A Christian life is a generous life. We share what we have and whenever we are feeling grateful, we give away anything and everything to others.

And certainly there are so many parables that Jesus offers us that could help us with building up this fruit within us, with cultivating the fruit of generosity. And some of the parables that come to my mind are the good Samaritan, where he took everything he had to take care of the one who was in need, or the parable of the workers in the vineyard who didn't matter how long they worked in the vineyard, that vineyard owner gave them a fair wage so that everyone could eat at the end of the day.

These are beautiful, beautiful parables about generosity. But I've never heard anyone use as a model of generosity, the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Isn't this parable fun? We have all kinds of interesting characters. We have a farmer. We have an arch enemy of the farmer because all farmers have arch enemies, right? And then we have a bunch of really, really faithful workers who are like, oh, something's wrong with the master's field. It ain't looking right. And then we have the reapers and we have wheat and we have weeds.

And we have drama, lots and lots of drama. We have intrigue. In the middle of the night, there's a sabotage. And then we have the workers who are asking

themselves what's wrong with our farmer? Did he use bad seed? And then we have this wise farmer who when confronted has already figured out how he's going to manage this big catastrophe. He's not going to touch the weeds. He's going to let them grow together, outwitting his arch enemy. And then we have those reapers who are going to make sure that at the end, the weeds get their due, and they get bundled up and thrown away and burnt to a crisp so that the farmer's enemy will lose.

And then we have actually the most disturbing part of the parable, which is Jesus' interpretation. I once read that the power of a parable is the strangeness and the vividness of the story. And it means that you actually can't quite pin down the meaning. And so it teases your mind into great activity and creative imagination to think about the possibilities.

But for some reason, those disciples, they really wanted a legend. They wanted a key chart to know what exactly the parable meant and the Savior of the world obliges. I actually have a chart here in my notes. The sower equals the Son of Man. The field equals the world. The wheat equals the children of the kingdom. The weeds equal the children of the Evil One and so on.

And then Jesus says, "the Son of Man will send His angels and they will collect out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Let anyone with ears, listen". Lord, have mercy upon us because it said all causes of sin and all doers of evil, all of them thrown into the furnace of fire.

I got to tell you with that kind of criteria, I guarantee I'm not going to be with all you wheat people. And there's another wrinkle in this story. It's very interesting. It was pointed out by a theology professor from Cameroon who I think would know these things. And she noted that those weeds and the word in the Greek that describes it probably meant one of the weeds that's ubiquitous in Israel, and it's called darnel or cockle.

And the interesting thing about these weeds is that as they are growing, you actually cannot tell the difference between what's wheat and what's weeds. And it's only when it grows to its ripeness, that darnel tends to take on a blackish color versus the wheat's more brownish color. And the wheat stocks, they tend to be a little bit heavier, whereas the darnel stands straight up. Either way, you can't tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds until it is time for harvesting.

And you know what's interesting about darnel is actually it can be toxic in large enough quantities. And the scientific name for the weed itself is drunk in Latin because that's sort of what would happen if you ingested some of it. You'd get drunk or you act high. In Shakespeare's King Lear, the King has a crown of darnel around him, which may be the reason that he acted so mad. And if you ingest enough of this darnel, it'll kill you.

Maybe there's a parable in that. Maybe refusing to be generous does the same thing to us. I think that people are the same way as those fields, you can't tell what's in them until we're ripe for harvesting, so to speak, you can't tell what's inside a person, whether they're wheat or they're weeds until it comes time for them to bear fruit.

A couple of weeks ago, my husband, Troy, and my 16-year-old son Miles and I, we took a trip. We went up north and we went to Traverse City, masks and social distancing and all, and we just had a couple of days away. And one of the things that we like to do is we like to eat a lot. We like to shop a little and then we always look for a place to play mini golf. And usually, our history is that Troy always wins and I come in second and Miles is third. But now he's 16 and he was no longer trying to beat his mom. He's trying to beat his dad. So it was a very important game for everyone.

And so we went to the local mini golf place and it turns out that half of Traverse City also went to the same mini golf place. And it was fairly crowded and there was a group of seven people who were right in front of us, it was six teenage girls and a dad. And so they would shoot their hole, they would play their hole and then we'd wait. And when they were finally done, then we would play our hole and we would be done of course, before they got through the second hole.

And so it went all the way through hole five. And these teenage girls were having a great time and they never made par. They were always over par. So it just took a little while. And so we were at hole five waiting for them. And then it turns out that the couple that was behind us caught up to us, of course.

And my son looked at that couple and the most interesting thing happened. He turned around and he said to them, why don't you guys go ahead of us because you're way faster than us? And then another really interesting thing happened very immediately. I looked at the couple and I said, oh no, we're not changing our order.

And my son looked at me aghast and the couple looked very, very, very surprised. And I thought, no, I got to wait for this gaggle of teenagers who've taken their own sweet time who can't seem to hit a ball into a hole. And now I've got to wait for them too? No. And then a most interesting thing happened.

The girls ahead of us turned to us and said, we're a little slow. Why don't you go ahead of us? And we did, and that whole mini golf game, which I lost stupendously, I just kept thinking what is wrong with me? Why am I so stingy? Why didn't I have a spirit of generosity? Why couldn't I be giving? I became a full blown weed in the field of wheat.

I was sharing this story with a friend who offered me a beautiful interpretation of the parable. This is what she texted me. "When Jesus is explaining the parable of the weeds, he speaks in a context to where it seems as though there are two

groups of people, the weeds and the wheat. However, I believe that these two exist in the same vessel. We are all comprised of weeds and wheat. The weeds are our selfish deeds, our deeds left undone. The wheat is our generosity, the best part of ourselves - the part that reflects God. So when the harvest comes, I don't believe that Jesus is talking about good people being separated from bad, but that what is impure, selfish, and sinful in us will be weeded out. And what will remain is the best of our spirit. That is what will be gathered to God."

My friend is like a freaking box of Wheaties. But what good news! It is not that you are either generous or not. It's not a matter that you're stingy or not. It's a matter of letting God change your spirit so that you no longer have a spirit of selfishness, of stinginess, of unbelief, but you've begun to have a spirit of generosity.

I, of course, was thinking about the mini golf experience throughout our little trip to Traverse City. On our final morning in Traverse City, Troy and I got up early and we had a lovely breakfast in the hotel. And our masked waitress was very nice, she was taking care of us and, and she was taking care of all the patrons there. And socially distanced from us about probably 10, 15 feet away was another patron who, when our waitress went up to him, he proceeded to berate her. He had a coupon that the restaurant wouldn't recognize and he made a real big stink about \$10. And he was really rude to our waitress. When we had finished our breakfast and Troy was getting ready to pay the bill, I leaned over to him and I said, double the tip. And just like that, I became wheat.

Can you imagine if the reaper had shown up right after the mini golf experience? I think that each of us is a work in progress and I beg each of us to remember that as we contemplate the weed-like behavior of others. When we encounter the evil of others, the stinginess of others, even the diabolical nature of the weeds among us, can we remember that all of us require God to renew a right spirit within us. All of us need God to transplant a spirit of generosity in our hearts. Don't rip out the weeds because you will kill the wheat.

So I invite you to surrender to God and to let God create a spirit of generosity in you. You may be like me and you may be a work in progress, but thank God there is progress. May you develop a spirit that will let people pass you in the mini golf line. May you cultivate a spirit of generosity so that reparations when someone has been treated poorly by others is easy for you. May you develop a spirit like that farmer of letting all live side by side, the good and the bad, because after all, God can do miracles and make weeds like you and me bear fruit of abundant generosity.

Amen.