



July 17, 2011

Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"..if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest... "
Matthew 13:29-30

Dear Friends;

The famous Groucho Marx was exiting an elevator as a priest was about to get on. The priest immediately recognized the comedian. The excited clergyman offered his hand saying, "I want to thank you for all the joy you've put into the world." Groucho replied, "And I want to thank you, Father, for all the joy you've taken out of it."

Many of us have become so concerned with pulling out the weeds that we lose our sense of hope and joy. Jesus came proclaiming the Gospel, a word that means "Good News." Are we joyful because we are followers of Jesus and know that all things will work themselves out in God's time? Today Jesus tells us some parables to help us laugh and have hope in the coming reign of God.

In order to understand the first parable we need to understand the cultural context of Jesus. This was a conflict orientated culture that defined itself in terms of who is an insider and who is an outsider. It was also competitive—one needed to always have one up on their enemies.

In the parable a competitor, enemy, has sown weeds among the farmer's wheat. When this becomes apparent the farmer-owner becomes the laughing stock of the village (feuding parties were a major form of entertainment in this pre-technological society). But the farmer does something unusual he doesn't retaliate.

He is crafty and allows the weeds and wheat to grow together. This was puzzling to everyone. But he knows that the wheat is strong enough to tolerate the competition with the weeds for water and nutrition. And he also knows that after the harvest not only will he have enough wheat but an unanticipated supply of fuel for his needs. The enemy's weed strategy has backfired and shamed the enemy. The farmer and his servants have the last laugh. The enemy who sought to shame others ends up being the object of shame.

In a society that was dedicated to vendetta, Jesus' parable says something profound. The farmer-owner refuses to retaliate against his enemy. The farmer's victory by seemingly doing nothing is a powerful lesson. A friend once told me when I had been wronged, "Living well is the best revenge." That certainly was the strategy of this parable's farmer-landowner.

The *Parable of the Mustard Seed* and the *Parable of the Yeast* also speak to us of the impossibility of halting the coming of the Reign of God. Like pernicious mustard—almost a weed, or like yeast making dough rise so comes the Reign of God. The only question is can we live by its demand of non retaliation, to be non-violent and loving? Can we have the patience of the crafty farmer to let things work themselves out?

There is a Chinese parable. Once a farmer had a horse, and the people of the village said how blessed he was. The farmer replied "we'll see." The horse escaped and the people said what a curse, the farmer replied, "we'll see." The farmer's son went to retrieve the horse and came back with it and several other wild horses. The people said what a blessing, and the farmer replied "we'll see." The next day the farmer's son tried to break one of the wild horses, fell and broke his leg. The people said what a curse and the farmer replied "we'll see." The next day the king's army came to the village to conscript all the young men, but they did not take the farmer's son because of his broken leg. The people said what a blessing and the farmer replied "we'll see."

The point of the parables of Jesus is to help us to see things in a new way. Today he invites us to hope and joy as we await the inevitability of the coming Reign of God. We do not have to pull up all the weeds they may be serving another purpose. So let us wait and see with joyous expectation.

Peace,

Fr Ron