

**JULY 19, 2020**

It didn't reach the same international level of crisis as the Covid19 pandemic. But seven years ago – the world was abuzz ... it was front page news around the globe. All centered around five simple words.

Shortly after he was elected - Pope Francis made some pretty big headlines when he made the comment “Who Am I To Judge?”.

New to this ministry, he was asked a question about sexuality ... the question itself I cannot recall (and in the greater scheme of things it really doesn't matter) – but he made a short statement and concluded with the phrase “Who Am I To Judge?”.

It went viral ... and people's reactions were many:

To some – the answer was YOU ARE THE POPE (that's what entitles you to judge ... you are the Vicar of Christ - Christ's representative on earth)

To others – the answer sounded like a shift in the position of the Roman Church

To me ... it was a much simpler message. I believe Pope Francis was saying “I may be Pope, I may be the most recognizable Christian in the world (and holder of the oldest office in Catholicism), but when all is said and done, I am simply one human being ...

His point (at least the point I took from him that day – and in the days since, simply by watching how he has served in this ministry) ... is that our calling is to love and serve. Moral Judging is for God – and none of us certainly is there ...

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Today's gospel passage teaches us an equally important lesson. One which may lead us to a more mature understanding of how God acts in our world.

In the parable Jesus tells, when the servants see the weeds growing with the wheat, they assume that it was what the owner had intended. This may sound foolish (on their part), until we realize that we make the same assumptions here in our own garden ... We often blame the owner for the poor crop.

There are some who believe that that if there is evil in our midst, then God must have put it there...that God must have deliberately planted evil among us.

Just think how many times we have heard it asked (or maybe even asked it yourself) ... Why Did God Allow this (something bad, or evil, or hurtful, or beyond any comprehension) - why did He allow to happen ???

Well, if we follow that line of thought, then only these two conclusions are possible:

- 1] that God is not all knowing and almighty (or else he would have foreseen the trouble that was to come).
- 2] that God intended for there to be evil people and bad things in our world.

To believe the first , is to believe that God is careless or stupid ... And that doesn't fit with the picture of a being who was able to create such an enormous and delicate universe in the first place.

To believe the second , would be to believe that God created some things only to have them destroyed ... so where is God's unending love or the gift of free will for those people who were created evil????

Fortunately, Jesus stops us from having to make these simplistic assumptions...as he tells the parable, we learn that it isn't God's stupidity or carelessness, or God's disregard for a part of creation that causes evil to enter into our lives, like the weeds growing in with the wheat.

It isn't God's intention to have these bad things happen at all ... they just do.

*“an enemy has done this” ...*

And (to be honest) I am not 100 percent behind this statement either. Because I believe (with every fiber of my being) that sometimes “stuff” happens ... sometimes good, sometimes bad, but not always orchestrated, not always part of some grand design.

Still — like good people, we want to fix it .... We want to get rid of the weeds in the garden . the people in the parable sure did ...

In the church (believe it or not) we see people quick to yank out the weeds which materialize as those whose beliefs are not in line with ours. Recent controversies in the Anglican Church (although really , it cannot be said that it is only a recent thing ... because these sort of separations, excommunications, and “weeding out”, have long been a part of our church history.

And if you think this is only something that happens in Europe or hundreds of years ago ... guess again. Not too

far from here (in a diocese near us) is a church whose members became SO upset with the practices of their own church, that half the members left the congregation – and opened another church, just two blocks away. They even called this church by the same name ,,,, and so one small southern Ontario town ended up with two Anglican Churches – one called Old St. Paul’s and the other New St. Paul’s.

We (in all sincerity) want to keep God’s garden tidy and weed free ...

But WAIT – comes the message. It is not our job to yank out the weeds. It is our job to nurture and feed the crop that was planted ... even as it grows surrounded by weeds.

God will sort things out in the end .... Not us.

Let them all grow together.

And thankfully – here is where the analogy must end. Because people are NOT plants. The plant cannot change its destiny, or what it is ... but a human can.

For us -- the truth is -- what may look like weed may turn out to be wheat tomorrow and what may seem to be wheat today, may be weed by harvest time. “

So even if we begin as weeds in this world (doing those things which aren't in line with what God intended), we are given the opportunity every day to become healthy and strong and to produce a bountiful harvest.....we are assured that we will not be discarded while we are still in our growing stages. We are promised a forgiveness and a love that will overpower everything else ... Even our own mistakes.

And as comforting as that promise is , it requires a certain spiritual maturity on our part. For to understand the parable in this way means that we have to give up our belief that God is responsible for all the bad stuff that creeps into our world.:

- pain and suffering
- wars and senseless destruction
- and any act which wounds or injures someone.

It also means that we must recognize that our part in this, is to NOT try and be judges ... but servants.

Tending to the garden (and all those who reside here) ... doing what we can to love and serve ... and maybe do some pruning.

And (ultimately) leaving the acts of judging and weeding and removal of the weeds – to the only one who can:  
God.