

# Sermon: Pentecost VII: Proper 12

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July 27, 2014

Year A

1 Kings 3:5-12

Psalm 119:129-136

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

We heard last week... you here... and Joel and me in Columbus... about the tares that were sown in with the wheat... and when they grew up some... the slaves asked the Master: *Then do you want us to go and gather them?*... and he said: *No... for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest...*

The good and the bad... together... side by side...

Fr. Robert Capon wrote about this: *the wheat... from start to finish... successfully does its proper work... the enemy may be a gigantic nuisance... but he is never a serious or ultimate threat...*

In the images you heard about two weeks ago when Barb preached... of birds eating the sown seed... or the rocky ground... or even the thorns... there is straightforward hostility... but there is also mystery... because when the tares come up with the wheat... there's a question that's asked: *But you sowed good seed... didn't you? Well... then where did these weeds come from... where did these weeds come from...*

Capon continues... *only God... only the farmer in charge of the universal operation... knows how to deal successfully with evil... and notice that God's competence in this applies both here and hereafter... both now during the growing season... and later at the harvest...*

*Here and now... while the mystery of evil is intermingled with the mystery of the kingdom... he wills to deal with it only by permission... by forgiveness... by letting it be.*

*But there and then... in the eschatological fullness of the kingdom... portrayed in the rest of the New Testament... he deals with it in terms of something that is still a mystery to us now... namely the mystery of the Resurrection...*

Today's Gospel continues with images of *significant things* coming out of *seemingly insignificant things*... the greatest of shrubs from the smallest of seeds... bread... perhaps the bread of life... from microscopic yeast... treasure of great value coming out of dirt... a pearl of great value from among what must have just been ordinary ones... good fish out of a sea of many others....

Let me ask a question... when you go to the grocery store... do you pick through the fruit to get the biggest and best pieces... if you're buying lettuce by the pound... and it's under one of those water misters... do you shake off as much excess water as you can... so you're not paying for water... if you look in the fish case... do you paw through the packages... and select one or two over the others... seeing only in the mirror darkly... we do our best to discern...

But discernment isn't always about good and bad... or right and wrong... the parable of the tares and the wheat tells us that good and evil exist together... and sometimes discernment is more about *experiencing* this tension... instead of being like the slaves who wanted to hurry up and go pull out the weeds... to do something... good... to feel productive... to do... instead of just be... and Jesus says... don't do anything... just yet... wait a while... let what's growing take its course... we can deal with it later on...

The way of the world... the way of Empire... is about right / wrong... good / bad... yes / no... the way of God's Kingdom... is right / right... good / good... yes / yes... and that's because evil can't exist in God's Kingdom... as we move along the continuum from

Empire to Kingdom... from division to unity... as we move from Paul's already / not yet... to the Kingdom of Heaven here and now... by the time the rejected fish... the rejected pearls... and the rejected people... make their way into God's Kingdom... the refiner's fire has burned all the divisiveness away... and replaced it with the unity of love... do you remember that piece from the Velveteen Rabbit that I've read before... *Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand...* I might add... to people who can't discern...

One of the women ministers who attends the Wednesday Bible study to which I go... told us briefly just this week about Polarity Management... an approach to conflict resolution that's about "identifying and managing unsolvable problems." It stresses the importance of recognizing that some situations just... don't... have... solutions... that life doesn't always have to be either / or... you can't breathe in... without breathing out... it has to be both / and... or... well... you know what happens...

While some issues *are* problems that have a definite answer... the more challenging issues are polarities... situations in which either side has both benefits and drawbacks... there's rest and activity... tradition and innovation... and two sides to many arguments... the real insight is being able to recognize when a situation contains polarities... instead of problems... and to learn how to manage them...

But in large part... the way of the world... the way of Empire... is to keep everything black and white... good and bad... right and wrong... if we begin acknowledge that there are any gray areas... when in our vulnerability... we acknowledge that we don't know it all... that there may be two *valid sides* to some situations... and when we can then say to someone... I can really understand why you might feel that way or... I can understand your way of thinking... we yank the rug of absolutes out from under the feet

of Empire... and power and authority can come crashing down... and Empire doesn't like to lose authority...

I'm better about dealing with uncertainty than I used to be... I am better about being wrong... than I used to be... I'm a recovering perfectionist... and I'm more comfortable with imperfection... but I still fight the tapes in me... and the messages that come from the world... from Empire... even from the Empire of the Church...

And it reminds me... that with many of Jesus' parables... there's an outer truth and an inner truth... that the tiny seed of possibility that was nurtured inside... by so many who helped me... has brought me to this bushy place... that there are weeds and wheat inside of me... that the yeast inside of me can help me grow into nourishing bread... that I am... that all of us are... when we dig deep enough into our minds and hearts... we are the fields in which great treasure can be found... we are fields waiting for the harvest... knowing that the mystery of Resurrection can deal... more effectively than we can... with the weeds inside us...

When we look at what's going on around us... with Central American refugee children... Russians and Ukrainians... Israelis and Palestinians... polarity management can help us understand that there may be some merit in both perspectives... that there *are* underlying tensions to be managed... but much of what we can see... like a grid-locked Washington... the shooting down of a civilian airliner... mortar fire in the Middle East killing hundreds of women and children... these are tensions which have simply erupted into life-damaging behavior... and what many politicians and governments do... is insist on the absolutes of black and white... they reflect the way of the world... and try to push the divisiveness and accusation which rule Empire... into the unity of Kingdom... instead of pulling the unity of Kingdom into the divisiveness of Empire...

There's a Hindu story... about Lord Krishna having to hold up a mountain to protect villagers and their village... from a fierce monsoon... and while Krishna's got the

mountain picked up... all the people get sticks... they all want to help him hold the mountain up... in truth... their efforts amount to little... but Krishna... like a loving Father... understands their desire to help...

Jesus asked them... "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

There is great hope... when we succeed in overcoming the personal challenges we face... and move along in our journeys... there is great hope... shown in the many who pick weeds by struggling and succeeding every day... to make this world safer... fairer... and more just... even when it sometimes feels like holding up a mountain... and it does feel sometimes like holding up a mountain... doesn't it...

There is great hope when we can pull Kingdom back into Empire... walk in someone else's shoes... see things from their perspective... manage the tensions and keep them from erupting into divisiveness...

And there is great freedom... in using the mystery of forgiveness... the mystery of resurrection... to deal with the mystery of evil... it brings the kind of discernment that a scribe gains... that the angels learn... when they are trained for the Kingdom of Heaven... to be a master who can bring out of their own field... the valuable treasure that is old... and the valuable treasure that is new... let's get our shovels and start digging...