

Sermon Poulsbo July 20 2014

When I was eleven my real father came into my life. Not the one who actually made me, together with my mom, but the one who acts like a father. Of course, my sister and I loathed him right from the start. When my mother asked what we thought about him, we snapped "He's ugly, he's stupid, and he's Danish!". But we soon came around, mainly because he really is a wonderful man, and also because he promised us a kitten and gave us lots of candy.

The candy giving continued on for many years. He commuted from Denmark, and every Friday he would stop by the tax-free store on the ferry boat and buy us a huge bag of Bassett's winegums. We would divide it up equally, and eat all of it, as only children can eat tons of candy without getting really sick.

After a while we got a sister. He didn't buy her on the ferry boat. Little Maj was the whole family's darling, a funny little monkey faced baby, who grew to be a cute little blonde, and quite strong willed, toddler and child. The candy was no longer just for me and Eva, my other sister. We had to share with Maj. So each Friday we sat down after dinner, opened the bag, and began the painstaking process of dividing the candy up into equal shares. One for me. One for Eva. And one for Maj. As soon as we tried to trick her, she told on us. So she got exactly as many winegums as we did. Only, she got only green ones.

The green ones are pretty disgusting. And it took my mom ages to understand why the kid smelled so bad.

Now, the point of this story is not to make y'all feel bad for my little sister.

The point is that justice and fairness seem to be so clearcut and easy to recognize, but they really aren't. We were completely fair to Maj, she got exactly as many candies as we did, but we were actually favoring ourselves. On the surface justice, but under it not. And this, my friends, is what happens almost every time humans attempt fairness and justice.

That is what makes us confused and anxious about this text I just read.

It is one of the clearest and most well explained parables Jesus gives. There is no real room for ambiguity. There are two kinds of people: good ones and bad ones, and at the end of days the bad ones will burn and the good ones will reside with the Father. Easy peasy.

Except that this justice, this absolutely clear cut view on how things will be, risks becoming the kind of justice that gives some of us yellow and red winegums, and others green ones. But that is not God's kind of justice.

What happens if we look at what the slave suggests with other eyes?

He comes to his Master questioning how the field looks. We don't know who the slave is supposed to represent, but it is easy enough to recognize him among ourselves, even in ourselves. "Why does the world look like this, God? Why do you

allow evil people to exist?" And on a smaller scale perhaps "Why does the church allow this or that person to come to services dressed like that, smelling like that, without ever giving, volunteering?" "Why does the city allow those people to live here, why does the country allow those people to enter, why why why?" And Jesus answers that in God's time, all will be set right.

It is not possible to tell evil people from good people. To root out evil, there is always the risk of collateral damage, and that, causing harm to innocents, is not God's way. God does not, ever, sacrifice some for the good of others. God does not, ever, condone the killing of innocents in the search for terrorists or enemies. There is nothing holy, or good, or God-like, or even acceptable about killing children in the name of God, safety, rules or whichever reasoning there might be. Not here, not in Gaza, not in Israel, not in Afghanistan or Ukraine or Sweden or wherever.

But because of how our world looks, we read the text in fear of the burning of the weeds, when we instead should read it with gratitude to our God who refuses to sacrifice even a single oar of wheat.

Even then, it's a difficult text. Because there is not a single one of us here today who is without sin, and not a single one who is without virtue. We are all sinners and saints. That makes this text truly tricky, because it's so black and white, and our experience of reality is that it's pretty much made up from shades of grey instead. Even if we find comfort in the thought that God does not want to sacrifice even a tiny speck of good to uproot evil, how does that help us when we are both?

Jesus tells this parable together with a few others from a boat by the beach in Galilee. He's been walking and talking and fighting with pharisees for days, over among other things what is allowed to do on the Sabbath and what is not. Humans longing to control God and the Son of Man, setting up rules for who is holy and who is not. Jesus tells them in no uncertain words that judgement belongs to the Father and no one else. And at the same time, Heaven is reachable for ordinary people, just like a pearl found in a field or a mustard seed sown, and only God decides who goes where.

And we need not fear, because God is a judge of infinite mercy and justice. Even though this parable paints people as either weeds or wheat, there are plenty of other times in Matthew's gospel, and the others, when one who has been worthless is found worthy, when one who has sinned is forgiven, and when one who was broken is made whole.

I am overwhelmingly grateful that I am not the one on whom justice and judgement rests. The temptation to keep the red winegums to myself is just too great. I try to be better, because I know I feel better when I am just and loving. We are all created that way. But it is not on my behavior that my salvation rests.

God, who does not want to see even a single speck of good get lost, is the one who

will make all evil go away. No more green winegums. No more injustice. No more war, no children lost. No more violence, no more hostility towards strangers. All the bad will go away, and the Kingdom will reign. Forever.