

Daphne C. Cody  
St. Elisabeth, Glencoe  
July 20, 2008

See you at the Harvest

Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jason and I bought a house in 2000, and our closing date was in early May.

That time of year the daffodils were fading, the trees were budding, and at this new house of ours, which had been in minor disrepair from benign neglect, the annual plants were starting to put forth their shoots. The beds, if you can call them beds, let's just say *the regions* of the lot had been absurdly overplanted.

We could tell that. But we couldn't tell much beyond that. What was what?

During the season we normally plan out our garden, we decided that in this case, in the summer of 2000, we might have to just wait to see what came up. We just focused on unpacking our boxes indoors and watched the plants outdoors do what they were going to do. In fact, it took us several summers to figure out

what had been put there on purpose, what were weeds, and what were probably unintended but pretty anyway. It was like a big discovery adventure, and we opted not to try to control it all right away—at least not until we knew more.

Jesus tells the story of the field of wheat and weeds, coming up together, with the farmer deciding to let it all be until the end of the age lest good plants be accidentally uprooted with the invasive species. Sometimes plants are intertwined. Sometimes it's just plain hard to tell what's what until the harvest anyhow.

At St. Elisabeth's Church we have a beautiful outdoor labyrinth, based on the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in the town of Chartres near Paris, France.

Visitors to Chartres, unless they're intentionally looking, will miss the labyrinth inlaid on the cathedral floor. They'll miss the labyrinth, not only because it's usually covered with cathedral chairs, but also because of the soaring, breathtaking, and amazingly famous stained glass cathedral windows. We

labyrinth-lovers will be looking down inside Chartres, but everyone else is looking upwards.

For several decades an Englishman named Malcolm Miller has given twice daily tour-lectures of the Chartres Cathedral...if you go to Chartres, don't miss one.

Malcolm Miller has become the world's expert on these medieval windows, and he knows and loves each one as if they were the sheep of his flock.

The stories of the Bible come alive in these splendid windows told through the art and worldview of their thirteenth-century artisan creators. One of the most prominent windows is about the End of the Age, the last Judgment, the Harvest.

I remember Malcolm Miller explaining to us tourists, Christian and non-Christian alike, that when people die, they rest for a time, that going straight to heaven or hell at the time of death is not probable. Resting in peace and waiting for judgment at the End of the Age is more what Jesus preached.

We tourists wondered about that as we looked at the windows. “You see,” Malcolm Miller explained, “the people who made these windows, and who prayed these windows, these people would think it should be impossible to know the wheat from the weeds right away. When I die,” he continued, “all my acts in my lifetime need to play out their effects into the next generation and the next. It’s not until the End of the Age that my life can be judged by how what I have done or left undone has carried forward into the future. Not until the Harvest can my life be judged with any accuracy whatsoever.”

If... even... God waits until the End of the Age for judgment on the plants in the field, how much more so should we wait. I ran across an old sermon from the 1800’s by Charles Kingsley of England on this parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Kingsley told his congregation: “The Lord does not blame the servants for their purpose [in wanting to tear out the weeds]. He merely points out to them the danger; and forbids it because it is dangerous; for their wish to root out the tares was not ‘natural.’ We shall libel it by calling it [‘natural’]. It was distinctly

spiritual, the first impulse of spiritual [people], who love right, and hate wrong, and desire to cultivate the one and exterminate the other. To root out the tares; to put down bad [people] and wrong thoughts by force is one of the earliest religious instincts. It is the child's instinct – pardonable though mistaken.”

Kingsley likens the impulse to root out the tares to the childish desire to shoot the bad guys. It's the comic book superhero instinct. And we pay money at the movies or buy videogames to stoke our spiritual appetites for this kind of thing. In the superhero world, the good guys wear white or otherwise obviously noble costume, and the bad things the bad guys do are so clear. Moral ambiguity is minimal. The point of the plot is always to shoot the bad guys, to rid the world of its underside dwellers. It's all so clear. Some of these comic books, movies, and videogames somehow make this whole enterprise somehow bloodless and clean, but many of them do tell the truth.

And in real life this approach to ridding the world of all unwanted elements, in hunting down anything that's not pure wheat, is often striking in its bloody

carnage, in its hideous destruction of beauty and order and wonder. Things are not so black and white in the spiritual realm, not as black and white as we thought they were when we were kids.

Adults, those mature in faith, those who are practiced in the spiritual things, are cautioned to exercise restraint in judgment. Mature persons know we could be wrong. We could do damage. We don't often have enough information. We cannot always read souls or interpret the times. God is always in the promise, beckoning us forward to a time yet unknown. This is the opposite of the Clockmaker God, who built a clock in the past, wound it up, and still sits in the past.

We proclaim instead a God that will be with us to the End of the Age, that in fact is waiting there for us at the End of the Age, saying "Come along, you can do this. Grow, grow, grow!"

In the world of the parable of the Field, life is not black and white. No, the field is green profusion. There's wheat and there's weeds and it's all mixed up, and God is there at the harvest. The sun shines and the rain falls on it all, and it's not our job to sort it out.

Our job instead is to receive the sun, let the rain soak us, let the Word take root in us, let the Son of God speak to us, let the sacraments nourish us, let those around us flourish. Our job is to yield, to grow, and to bear grain.