

The Lessons Appointed for Use

on

Proper 10

Year A

RCL



Isaiah 44:6-8
Psalm 86:11-17
Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

The Collect

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthi-

ness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Isaiah 44:6-8

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.

Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.

Who has announced from of old the things to
come?

Let them tell us what is yet to be.

Do not fear, or be afraid;

have I not told you from of old and declared it?

You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?

There is no other rock; I know not one.

Psalm 86:11-17

Inclina, Domine

- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and I will walk in your truth; *
knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name.
- 12 I will thank you, O LORD my God, with all my
heart, *
and glorify your Name for evermore.
- 13 For great is your love toward me; *
you have delivered me from the nethermost Pit.
- 14 The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent men seeks my life; *
they have not set you before their eyes.
- 15 But you, O LORD, are gracious and full of com-
passion, *
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.
- 16 Turn to me and have mercy upon me; *
give your strength to your servant;
and save the child of your handmaid.

17 Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be
ashamed; *
because you, O LORD, have helped me and com-
forted me.

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would

uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire,

so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

SERMON

I confess that I have always been uncomfortable with talk of “the devil”. The devil is inescapable in Scripture, but I’m still uncomfortable with the idea. How do we square the devil with our passage from Isaiah?

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.

You can see my problem and the source of my discomfort. We don’t see the devil as a god yet he seems to have a god-like influence over the world and that troubles me. Invoking a devil as the cause of what is wrong is one way to distance ourselves

from the problem. “Wasn’t me. The devil made me do it.” The solution seems so simple: beat the devil out of the world. And yet...Maybe not.

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.’

This is the world in which we live – one of wheat and weeds. Worse yet, we’re being told that we

can't simply eradicate evil without paralyzing ourselves into complete inaction, like monks in a cell.

There is hope, though. We might not be able to remove the weeds from the field, but we can still tend to the harvest. The point I'm reaching for is that because we are IN the world, we are part OF it. We aren't uninvolved observers. When we get all self-righteous over the misdeeds of others or speak of devils, we start to divide the world into the "good guys" and the "bad guys". The truth is that we, each of us, is a field sown with wheat and weeds. We are composite creatures, alloyed of good and bad.

Few better examples of our alloyed natures could be imagined than this transcript from the officers'

body cam during the arrest of George Floyd, who died from injuries sustained during his arrest:

Officer Lane, “Should we roll him on his side?”

Officer Chauvin, “No, he’s staying put where we got him.”

Officer Lane: Okay. just worry about the excited delirium or whatever.

Officer Chauvin: Well that's why we got the ambulance coming.

Officer Lane: Okay, I suppose.

Nine minutes later, Floyd was dead. Often, in making an arrest, police must use force. The youngest officer was thinking of the harvest and asked if Floyd couldn’t be placed in a safer position. The senior officer’s attention was elsewhere and he said no.

Another example: This weekend, Congressman John Lewis, known as the conscience of the Congress, died at age 80. As chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, he was one of the “Big Six” leaders of groups who organized the 1963 March on Washington, and played many key roles in the Civil Rights Movement and its actions to end legalized racial segregation in the United States.

On March 7, 1965—a day that would become known as “Bloody Sunday”—Lewis, several religious leaders, activists, and some 600 marchers attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, a bridge named after a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, to protest the police shooting death

of unarmed protester, Jimmie Lee Jackson, a few weeks earlier and in support of voter rights. The plan was for marchers to walk to then-Gov. George Wallace's office. Gov. Wallace ordered the Alabama Highway Patrol chief to "use whatever measures are necessary to prevent a march."

At the end of the bridge, marchers were confronted by Alabama State Troopers, who ordered them to leave. Instead they began to pray. Police then launched tear gas, while mounted troops began beating nonviolent protesters with nightsticks. Lewis' skull was fractured in the melee and the scars from that day were still visible as he got older. The visions of police beating protesters, which were broadcast across America, prompted

President Lyndon B. Johnson into signing the Voting Rights Act into law on Aug. 6, 1965. John Lewis tended to the harvest, watering it with his own blood.

I have another example. Decades ago, I was a University policeman – a campus cop. As these things go, that's pretty far down the pecking order. As history rolled on, our country involved itself in a war in Vietnam, a war widely viewed as unnecessary and unlawful. Many young people were opposed and expressed their opposition, including young people at the University of Kentucky. The protests caused some property damage, and the National Guard, with fixed bayonets, were called in to protect the University property. It's not widely known, but

the role of the University Police was to patrol the area between the Guard and the students, keeping the two groups apart, lest there be injuries. Tending to the harvest, as we understood it.

As I said at the beginning of this little reflection, I have done some good things in my life. I'm proud that I was able to do so, but if I ever get it into my head that I did those good things because I'm one of the good guys, you can look for me in the weeds. Any good I have accomplished is to the glory of our Father and as a result of His leading me to it, not any merit on my part. For my part, I am a field sowed in wheat and weeds.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Anthony de Mello was a Jesuit priest and spiritual director whose writings drew from both Eastern and Western mystic traditions. Some of his most beloved parables are short sayings of “the Master,” whom de Mello described as a composite of rabbi, guru, monk, roshi and sage. Here’s one.

“All human beings are about equally good or bad,” said the Master, who hated to use those labels.

“How can you put a saint on an equal footing with a sinner?” protested a disciple.

“Because everyone is the same distance from the sun. Does it really lessen the distance if you live on top of a skyscraper?”¹

1 Excerpted from *Awakening: Conversations with the Masters* with permission of Random House.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be
gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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