



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Love Will Win

SCRIPTURE:
Matthew 13:24-30

May 29, 2022 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

When innocents suffer, when life is harsh, when we find ourselves in the midst of the storm, where is God in all of that? Last Sunday I suggested there is a lack of answers to that question, but faith does give us a response. We battle suffering. We face suffering with compassion, courage and good cheer. Oh, we also face it with heartbreak, rage, and gut-wrenching sorrow. But we don't stay there. We battle because the love of God is trustworthy. "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come, 'tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." But there is more.

Jesus told the story: You till the soil, you plant the seed. You water and wait. Eventually, there is the harvest. Like all of Jesus' stories, this is about the kingdom of heaven or God's promised day. If I understand the text, the promise here is that in time, God will make right everything that has gone wrong. In time, God will heal all that is broken and bruised. All that is good and beautiful and holy will be gathered up—none of it lost. Love is a tender power; it is a vulnerable strength, but the promise of the gospel is that love will win.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. articulated this promise. He often said the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. That's the promise of this parable. The world is beautiful, but it is also broken. Much that is broken in us, and in all, is beyond our capacity to repair. It sounds hopeless, but this beautiful and broken world is loved by God, and in God's promised day, all that has gone wrong, God will make right. Love is a tender power; it is a vulnerable strength, but love will win.

But before we get there, we live through the season of weeds in the garden. We know this truth. Nothing is pure. None of us is pure... no deed, no

motive, no choice, no relationship. There are always weeds in the wheat.

When we recognize this truth, our first reaction is to fix it. "Master, do you want us to weed the garden? We can pull the weeds from the ground, just rip out all of the bad. Do you want us to make everything right?"

Surprisingly, Jesus says, "No, you will do more harm than good." I say 'surprisingly' because Jesus often says: Go and do the good that is yours to do. Love your neighbor. Turn the other cheek. Forgive 70 times seven. Discipleship is an active lifestyle. It involves a lot of doing. But here, Jesus says, "No. Leave it to God. Leave it to God because you will do more harm than good." Sometimes that's the truth.

There was an incident. I don't remember the details, but my father-in-law was acting in a way that I thought did not show my wife respect. Dads can be that way sometimes; we forget that our grown children are grown and we treat them like they are children. Well, he was treating her like a little girl and I didn't like it. So, I told him so. He was not immediately receptive. But I held my ground. "You shouldn't treat her like a little girl," I said. "She's a grown woman and deserves your respect."

"I'm not disrespecting her," he said. "Are too." "Am not." It went on from there.

Carol was silent. I didn't need her to thank me for standing up for her. I knew she felt loved and appreciated. But you are never going to guess what happened. She was mad at me. Can you believe it? "Do you think," she said, "do you think I need you to fix my relationship with my own father? Do you think I can't take care of this on my own? Don't treat me like I'm a little girl."

Uhhhh. Leave those weeds alone. Some things we just can't fix.

There is a prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr,

which has been part of many 12-step programs, that speaks to the wisdom of this parable: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.”

There is wisdom there. But there is also a danger in this parable. This word should never be used to justify problems we *can* fix.

I was about ten when my dad taught me how to replace a window. We measured the pane and went to a glass shop and purchased the glass. We chipped out all the old caulk and removed what was left of the broken window, placed the new window in the sill and recaulked it. Then we painted it. I would have been pretty proud of my new skill, but the new window was not at our house. It was at the van Arsdale’s house. It was their window that was broken when somehow my baseball ended up in their living room. So, I learned how to replace a window.

My Dad told me, “You broke it. You repair it.” It’s a good practice with windows and cars and even more so with people. There is always repair work that needs to be done.

The rest of that prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Many of you have reached out in the wake of the horrific shooting at Robb Elementary School on Tuesday. Uvalde is now a town added to the others: Sandy Hook and Columbine. Las Vegas, Orlando and Virginia Tech. Bethesda and Charleston and Aurora. Buffalo and Kansas City. The list is endless.

Gun Violence Archive tracks mass shootings. They define a ‘mass shooting’ as an incident where there are four or more casualties. According to their records, there have been 48 mass shootings in the United States this month—including seven this week. Kansas City has suffered 65 homicides so far this year, mostly as a result of gun violence.

Our response has lacked wisdom. We seem to be saying: There are weeds in the wheat; what are you going to do? There are some problems that are really hard; not much we can do. But that is

unacceptable. Some people of power say they are grief-stricken. I believe them. They say they are praying. I believe that, too. But you and I know this: Prayer is not a practice to baptize the status quo. Prayer is the practice that inspires us to live toward God’s promised day and that is a day when our “children can grow up to be neither the destroyers nor the destroyed.”¹

They were just children—just moments away from the ham sandwiches and peach slices they would eat for lunch. But they never made it because human beings do inhumane things and because it is almost as easy to get a gun in this country as it is to make a reservation for lunch.

We are grieving and we should grieve. But we should also be ashamed. It doesn’t have to be this way; we can do better. No nation of honor sacrifices her own children this way. As people of faith—forever living toward God’s promised day—we must do the good that is ours to do. Yes, there are problems we cannot fix. Yes, there are issues we will not solve, but we do the good that is ours to do and it matters. And people of power and people who profit from the slaughter of innocents, it is time for them to do the good that is theirs to do.

As Jesus taught us in another parable, when your neighbor is dying in the ditch, to pass by on the other side is sinful. No nation of honor sacrifices her own children this way.

I am grateful for people like Charlotte Davison and her work for gun safety in our community. Every Session meeting, she reminds us of the crisis as she reads the names of those shot and killed by guns in our city. The list is never short. I am grateful for Alice and Al Eidson and their mental-health initiative that Village, and many of you, are supporting. It matters.

“God, grant us the courage to change the things we can.” The parable does not bless inaction, but it does affirm the trustworthiness of God.

Windows can be repaired and sometimes so can injuries among friends. Even hard things can be made right. But sometimes the most faithful thing to do is to trust that God will make right that which we can’t.

1 This is a paraphrase of a quote from Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, p. 299

During seminary, I was a campus minister at Clemson University. At our meetings, students would take turns leading devotions. One evening Linn offered the devotion. I will never forget it. Linn was the faculty advisor. A couple of years before I met them, Linn and his wife Kay lost their elementary-aged son, Ashley, to leukemia. Linn shared his story. He spoke of weeping all night in a hospital room, lifting pleading prayers to a silent ceiling: “God, heal my son.”

But Ashley did not survive. Linn said, “I will forever carry the scars of grief in my heart, but I want you to know that resurrection is not just for those who have died. Somehow God brings new life even to those who hurt so badly our greatest fear is that we will never die. I have been to hell, but bit by bit, heartbeat by heartbeat, God is resurrecting me. I am alive again.”² This is the promise of the parable: God is trustworthy.

Sometimes there are things we cannot fix; there are wrongs we cannot make right, there are injuries we cannot mend. Jesus says: Leave it to God. For in time, God will sort the weeds from the

wheat and all will be well. As we sing, “through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come, ‘tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

Suffering has probably already come to you. If not, it will. It is not something I can explain, but I do think God empowers us to battle suffering with courage and good cheer.

And when there are things we cannot make right, leave that to God, who will be faithful. There is a promised day toward which we are living.

It is a day when justice will roll down like waters, it is a day when swords will be beaten into plowshares, it is a day when our burdens will be laid down and our griefs will be healed. It is a day when the hungry will be fed, and all people will know dignity, and the children will grow up to be neither the destroyers nor the destroyed.

In time, God will redeem all that has gone wrong, and all will be well—all manner of things will be well. Love is a tender power; it is a vulnerable strength, but love will win.

² Kay and Linn Dearing served for decades as faculty advisors to the Presbyterian Student Association at Clemson University. Their faith has left an impact on many students and at least one interim campus pastor.