

Proper 11 A (Romans 8:12-25 Matthew 13:24-30,36-43)

I accidentally killed a living thing this week. It was a fish. I didn't mean to!

I have taken the lives of some fish in the past, on purpose.

Nice big fish that looked good to eat.

This fish was little and needed some more time to grow.

We were fishing on a lake in the mountains, and lures of various sorts had not interested the bass lurking the shadows.

I'd bought some red worms for visiting young cousins and stuck one on a hook.

The little bream couldn't resist and took the hook deeply.

Getting it out wasn't easy, and he didn't swim when returned to the lake.

There he floated on his side, a rebuke to the incautious fisherman.

That is a story about unintended consequences, that anything we do may work out differently than we had expected; that outcomes in addition to those we were seeking are often experienced.

The slaves in the Lord's parable were surprisingly quick to offer to uproot the weeds that had been sowed in with the grain.

They were grappling with an act of agricultural sabotage; someone had sowed weed seeds in the night, before the grain had germinated.

And they were ready to take action; let us go gather the weeds from among the wheat.

The master sensed the problem before they did; that weeds have roots and roots are not tidy, singular things.

They intertwine and hold each other, and some measure of the wheat would surely be uprooted with the weeds in the process.

What we set out to do is not the only thing we accomplish.

Some wonderful, unexpected things may happen when we seek to do some thing.

But there may also be collateral damage.

Tragedy may even flow from our good intentions.

Why is this? Why can't we do the simple good we mean to?

There are too many reasons and not enough time:

We live in a complex world and find that we cannot change just one thing.

A middle school biology class would teach us of the interconnectedness of all of life; for the creation is a like a spider web.

Human communities are similarly complex.

You've heard about how the advent of air conditioning lead to houses without front porches, which led to fewer neighborly interactions and our frayed sense of community.

Or maybe it was the interstate highways, meant to foster long distance transportation, which destroyed many old neighborhoods and hollowed our cities out as suburbs were created.

Or the transforming effects of the automobile or the internet or smart phones;

Or how the great achievements of modern science seemed for a time in the 1940s to have culminated in the atom bomb and gas chamber.

Or how our charity can destroy the lives of those it is meant to help.

There are a million such stories to be told, of how our ingenuity and creative power have untold and unexpected consequences.

They are all stories of how sin runs through our human endeavor; how a certain brokenness is always at hand.

St. Paul thus writes of “the creation subjected to futility... groaning in labor pains” and speaks elsewhere in Romans of his inability to do the good that he so desperately wants to do.

So, our problem is hardly a new one; a futility attends us.

Paul left us a great record of his acrimonious relationship with the churches he started, where his best efforts nonetheless produced strange and bitter fruit.

Perhaps despairing of his own efforts, he announces here a “hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Hear that; how glorious; not only can we hope to be saved, to get to heaven, but the sideways ways of this world, the one-step-forward, two-steps back mode of life is somehow to be addressed, to be redeemed by God.

The futility to which we have been subjected will end; the labor-like struggle will turn into the wonder of a new birth,

And good that is done will do good, and a brighter line will divide the evil from the good.

And that will be true freedom and great glory, when no one must lose for me to win, when my efforts to help never hurt, when no one is uprooted by our plans.

The Scriptures tell us that we will not get to that point on our own power, by our own effort, not by developing techniques that allow us to act with perfect freedom and goodwill.

We will get to the day when good will is complete and good work is done in perfection, when Christ brings his kingdom fully in.

We work and give and pray for the spread of the kingdom, but it is God’s project and it is in Christ’s hands.

“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... Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Our ears run to hear the troublesome part about evil doers being thrown into the fire but slow down, and hear that *all causes of sin* will be thrown into the fire as well.

All the causes; all the confused, backwards, disordered things of human life will melt away, and the righteous will be revealed.

All that eats away at our capacity to do the good will be taken away.

Righteousness will shine.

That is what is promised on the day to come, when Christ is all in all.

And it is shown to us in the great day of his saving work, when he died on the Cross.
The people who put Jesus there, of course, were the ones with the programs and plans.
Religious leaders, Roman authorities, people sure they were doing good in the world, who
should have been more troubled than they were about those things that didn't work out quite
like they planned.

Whatever was going on in Jesus, they determined to uproot, and the taking of his life in the
process did not concern him.

Whatever trauma it inflicted on those who loved him did not bother them.

Jesus absorbed, in his body and suffering, and by his supreme love, all the violence that
accompanied their plans, the terrible good they thought they were doing.

And the purity of the life he there laid down is the foretaste of that realm to come.

I might be heard here offering a call to quietism, to a patient, fatalist endurance of life's
injustices and difficulties.

Don't try to do anything, for you'll do more harm than good.

I don't mean to say that.

We are not meant to be resigned to the power of sin over us.

But remembering the power of sin over us would lead us always to a certain humility when we
plan and program the world,

And perhaps to a resistance when the uprooters and revolutionaries assure us that their motives
are simple and pure.

Only one is simple and pure; only one will restore the whole creation.

He is Jesus.