Book 13

Sunday May 27, 1984

"HOW TO DEAL WITH IMPATIENCE" Galatians 5:22, Matt: 13:24-30

Impatience can be difficult to handle, both in ourselves and in others. Often when we see something going wrong, or at least not going the way we had planned it, our first tendency is to rush in and straighten things out. We're ready to take quick action.

But can our impatience, even though our motives are good, sometimes only make matters worse? There are times when doing good or what we think is good, only does more harm.

It is to this issue of impatience and the harm it can do that the parable we have just heard from the Bible is directed. And this story like all the parables Jesus told, comes straight from the life and work of the people of his day.

A man sowed a field with good seed and then went to bed. Having done his work, he could sleep with good conscience. But something else was happening. There was another hand at work. At first it wasn't visible. But one morning he was bewildered to discover that weeds were growing and were mixed in with the good wheat.

Many parents have experienced this with their children. They raised the child as carefully as possible, surrounded the child with a good atmosphere, cherished him or her with love and all in all believed they haved done their very best. Yet despite all this, something else begins to grow. Strange things happen to the child. They see impulses and stirrings that they do not want to see. Other influences have come beaming in and some look like weeds that should be pulled out immediately. So what do they do? Do they panic in impatience and try to root out what they consider the evil impulses? Or do they wait it out for a while?

Let's look at this parable in more detail in an attempt to find some answers for dealing with our impatience.

1. First of all, the parable reminds us that there is evil at work in the world all the time and in every place. In the very moment in which the word of God sounds from the pulpit, that sinister power is at work sowing its

toxic seed among the furrows. In the best of us there is evil at work. In the best of our intentions and actions, evil is lurking. There are no fields or gardens in this world where only grain or flowers grow.

It is every strange how everything, the greatest and the smallest--mysteriously spoils and decays. Non-violent and peaceful movements can become infected with the very violence they oppose. In the effort to get textbooks out of the schools or libraries which some consider immoral, immoral tactics are used and the damage to society may even be worse than if the textbooks had remained.

So the parable reminds us that our best intentions may be used in destructive ways and particularly when we are too impatient. Our world and our lives always have weeds growing in them and these weeds are inter-twined with the good. There is no perfect person, no perfect marriage, no perfect job, no perfect church, no perfect nation. The parable is further saying--"Don't be surprised by the presence of evil in the midst of the good. And above all, don't panic because of it.

If we are shocked by the presence of evil in the midst of goodness and in the midst of our best intentions, then be especially careful of our impatience.

2. Note secondly, the parable is saying much more than just reminding us that there is always evil in the world amidst the good; that weeds are constantly being sown and usually while we are unaware of it, so that for awhile it goes unnoticed.

The parable deals next with ~~our~~ what our reaction is to be toward what we consider the weeds when we are aware of them. It deals with our response to what we consider evil. It deals with our impatience.

In the parable, the servants were impatient and wanted to go immediately out into the field and pull out all the weeds. And we can understand the impatience of the servants. They had worked hard to put in a clean crop and now they discover weeds.

Our response too, is often that of wanting to immediately root out all the evil, get rid of it as fast as we can; deal with it quickly and harshly. But the Master in the

parable new better and God knows better. He told the servants, "Don't panic! Don't rush in too quickly. Wait until both the weeds and the wheat grow and are ready for harvest. Then the weeds can be destroyed because they can be easily separated." It's a matter of timing.

But why we ask? Why should we be patient rather than impatient? The parable makes several suggestions.

1. First of all we are not to panic, not to give in to our impatience because in the early stages of growth it's very difficult to tell the difference betweeen the weeds and the good wheat. Evil is not alwys that easy to recognize, particularly when we are impatient.

As mentioned earlier, good and evil are quite often mixed up with each other, closely intertwined in this world. And in our haste, in our impatience, in our snap judgements we may find that we have pulled out the good grain instead of the weeds--we may do more harm than good.

The fact is, many times our impatient judgments about what is good and what is evil are wrong. Appearances are often deceiving. To distinguish between the good guys and the bad guys is not as easy as some of the television programs would have us believe.

In fact, the people we think are the bad guys may turn out in God's judgment to be the good guys. This is certainly what happened in Jesus' time. He heard the word "sinner" applied freely to persons around him. And it was more than a word then. It had a real bite to it. It indicated someone you could not associate with or exchange greetings with, even though you knew the person by name. To call a person a sinner was to make him or her an outcast, and you were supposed to separate yourself voluntarily from all relationship with that person.

It is a striking fact that Jesus paid little or no attention to the distinctions that were supposed to separate sinners and saints. On the contrary, his harshest words were for those who considered themselves most religious and the most righteous.

What a difference it would make if there were fewer of the snap impatient judgments, less of the quick condemnations,

no more of the hurrying to and fro from person to person stirring things up; no more executing of character by hearsay and gossip when someone disagrees with us even in fundamental matters. None of these, but a willingness to let both grow together in the harvest; the infinite patience to let truth be proved in the event itself. "By their fruits you will know them," said Jesus. This is the kind of patience God has. We've heard the saying--"The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine."

The parable therefore calls for a willingness to let God be the final judge of people and it warns us as we attempt to play the role of God. Too often in the past and the present, the church and good church people have too quickly damned people to hell, while God accepts and forgives.

This is the tragedy of moralists. They want to root out all vice, practice censorship and quickly rid the world of all sin. And as they set out in grim earnest on their virtuous crusades, these same good people are quite oblivious of the fact that evil is also at the same time working in them. The weed seed is being sown at that very moment.

So this parable speaks of a patience required in dealing with what we judge to be evil or wrong and with other problems as well. IT says, "don't panic!' Think before you act and be patient rather than impatient. There is often an interval involved in the growth of good and evil to that point where they can be correctly identified and dealt with.

2. In the second place, the parable cautions us to be patient and not panic and be in a big hurry to pull out the weeds, not only because we cannot tell the difference between what is good and bad, but also because in our impatience to tear out the weeds too soon, we may at the same time damage much of the good grain.

In other words, sometimes it may be that our best efforts to work at a problem particularly when we are impatient, will only make the situation worse. Recently I came across a new social law that describes this effect. It is called "Forrester's Law," and this maxim holds that

in complicated situations, efforts to improve them often tend to make them worse, sometimes much worse and on occasion calamitous.

Dr. Jay W. Forrester, a professor of ~~management~~ at M.I.T, says that we can often expect surprising and dismaying results from reforms that fail to take into account the many and diverse ways individuals and groups can react to even the simplest, let alone, the most complex changes in the social environment. To put it simply, in our impatience to improve things, we can make them worse.

So for example, police officers will not shoot at a fleeing robber on a crowded street, lest more damage be done than good.

Now to talk this way is not a poorly disguised plea to be soft with evil or to take no action at all when things go wrong. It is a plea that we be patient and seek to be sure of our action before we move, lest we destroy the good along with the bad.

To go after dissenters with a vengeance, for example, may also in the end destroy freedom of dissent and freedom of speech along with it. Or to quickly want to censor everything we don't like or which rubs us the wrong way may in the process do more damage than we had counted on.

So the master in the parable said, "let them grow together until the harvest." Don't panic! Don't act too soon! Patience, great patience; patience akin to that of God's patience is essential to the building of anything worthwhile.

Sometimes one of the partners in a marriage will rush in to the office of a marriage counselor and say they just found out something about their spouse and they want to take immediate action. The couunselor's usual advice is like that of this parable. "Don't panic!" Wait before you rake hasty action you may regret.

There is a time for action, but there is also a time for patience, for waiting--a time for listening and learning before we act in panic.

Again, I emphasize that the kind of patience this parable is talking about does not mean being soft with evil or

sentimental about wrong-doing. Rather patience requires a firmness, but a firmness coupled with wisdom and a gentless born of an awareness of the need for time in which the evil can be correctly identified and overcome.

3. Thirdly, true patience has its roots in the providence and faithfulness of God. Jesus could be patient, because he knew that ultimately God is in control and ultimately God is good.

This kind of patience includes learning to live each moment for that moment, each hour, each day, whereas impatience is that attitude which is always trying to hurry time along--when we say, "I can't wait until tomorrow, or until next week, or until next year."

Particularly in our time when people are tense and worried about many problems, the advice, "don't panic!" is important. Remember God doesn't panic. Waiting, proper timing; both are necessary if we are to effectively deal with the problems that confront us. We are to be as patient as God is patient with sinners. God never writes any one of us off as hopeless. That's the good news. Amen.