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Year A Proper 11
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This week I received another edition of the monthly newsletter put out by the Episcopal church I attended as a child, St. George's Episcopal Church in Houston Texas. Their newsletter, the Dragonslayer, had some interesting articles in it. You may remember that I have spoken about St. George's before. It is a small church with attached preschool. I love to keep up with its happenings.

Well, in this most recent newsletter was an article about their Vacation Bible School that they had the last week in June. Their deacon, Deacon Jane, led VBS and decided the theme would be a different parable every day they met that week. Deacon Jane chose her parables from the Lectionary readings for this Summer so that after VBS the students would continue to hear them and be reminded of the lessons they learned. I read the summary of each day's studies and activities, what the children said they learned, and Deacon Jane's takeaway of that day's Bible lesson. I was so thrilled as I read through the days and came to Friday of VBS and found the parable the children studied was the one from our Gospel reading today. I was excited, to be honest, because after reading Jesus' parable I was kind of at a loss about what to say. It seemed rather overwhelming what with the weeds being collected to be burned in the fiery furnace. As I started to read the

summary, I wondered to myself what the children learned from the parable and what they could teach us.

The first part of the summary had a third grader, Tatum, explaining what she learned from the story. She said the first thing she learned was that it isn't always a good idea to pull up weeds. She said she didn't know that as her mother always has her pulling weeds up in their garden and she gets rather tired of doing it. She was glad Jesus let the weeds grow. I thought about this for a while and the reasons Jesus gave for not pulling the weeds up in the very beginning—Jesus told the workers to wait because if they tried to pull the weeds up at the beginning it would end up killing the wheat, as well, and then there would be no harvest at all.

Another VBS attendee, Chance, wondered how the workers could know the difference between the weed and the wheat once it was grown. I wondered that as well and Deacon Jane answered this question in her summary. She explained that the weed referred to is most likely darnel or cockle, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and real wheat is evident only when the plants mature and the ears appear. The ears of the real wheat are heavy and will droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight. So, even though the workers were wanting to pick the weeds that had

come in, it would not be until harvest that they would be identifiable and could be separated and burned.

Deacon Jane stated that during formation time, the older grade school students (third through fifth graders) were supposed to act out the parable that Jesus told each day. On this day, they divided into two groups—one the wheat and one the weeds. The wheat started out together in the field. The weeds came in, looking just like the wheat in the middle of the night. The workers came and asked the sower of the wheat if they could kill the weeds. The sower told them to wait. The workers waited and as time passed, the wheat and weeds grew and grew, but as they grew, the wheat began to influence the weeds. The children in the play decided that no one should go into the fire and the wheat so changed the weeds that they all were harvested for the good of the sower.

Jesus ends the parable saying . Let anyone with ears listen! And I think the children did just that. They listened to that parable and incorporated all of Jesus' teachings into it.

In reflecting on the acting out of the parable, I really like the fact that the wheat could influence the weeds and the weeds could change. I understand that doesn't really work in botany. A rose is always a rose and can't become a tulip. But, humans are not bound by such strict laws. I think we can take Jesus' parable and

apply it to ourselves. There are many types of humans and I believe that those that follow Jesus' teaching and way of love can make a difference in the lives of those that don't. So, much so that the ones who don't are able to make the decision to accept Jesus' grace and redemption and become followers themselves. Jesus told us to LISTEN and listen we must. It is our job to take what we learn from Jesus and share that Good News with others. In today's parable, we come away with a dark vision of how things can go—God's people will be lifted to heaven but those from the evil one will be burned in the fiery furnace. But, we have ears to listen and brains to change and hearts to accept the love and grace offered by God through Jesus Christ. Last month, I asked you to do three things when you left the church. Does anyone remember what they were?

Choose A or B

- A. Wow, I'm impressed that you remembered them. I am going to ask you to do those three things again with a little of a different spin on them this time but first I want to tell you something.
- B. If not, that's okay because in a few minutes I am going to remind you of them and ask you to do them again but a little differently.

We have so much to do—there are so many people in need out there and we need to work so that they will become part of God’s kingdom. A kingdom that is at our hand and which we can bring to this earth through the love of Christ. We must make a difference in others’ lives, both by using our lips and by how we behave in our lives. St. Michael’s is excellent at outreach and I really appreciate all that you do for those at Laundry Love and the local unhoused community. Everyone is always thinking of ways we can reach out and help those that need the love and care of God. I so appreciate it. But, I am going to ask you to do a little bit more: (here come the three things): There are a little different because I’ve learned some things and incorporated them into my request this time.

Please, before next week:

1. Invite someone to come to something at St. Michael’s. Wild Men, Saucy Sisters, Wise Women, the monthly Movie and Potluck night we will be having next month. Sometimes inviting someone to church is too much for them to agree to but inviting them to something fun that occurs at the church will give them some familiarity with St. Michael’s and they may return in the future.

2. Pray for someone every day this week. Last month I told you that you had to tell them but I will remove that stipulation. Pick someone and pray for them every day this week.
3. Finally, send someone you know a handwritten letter or card to let them know you are thinking of them and how much you appreciate them being in your life.

If we are the wheat and I sincerely believe that we are, we must get to work to ensure that everyone becomes part of God's beloved community and are taken up by the angels that Jacob saw ascending and descending on his ladder so long ago. God's love is available and waiting for EVERYONE. We must do all that we can to make sure others know this. Remember in our Baptism, we agreed to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. We must continue to do this at all times and wherever we can. We have something wonderful in Jesus Christ and we need to share that with others. So, I send you out to live out your Baptismal Covenant, by doing what I know you always do—loving God, loving yourself and always always loving your neighbor. Amen.