

**God Finds and Frees Us**

July 19, 2020

Matthew 13: 24-30 and 36-43

*<sup>24</sup> He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup> but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup> 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?' <sup>28</sup> He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' <sup>29</sup> But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> 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.'"*

*<sup>36</sup> 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." <sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup> the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup> and they will throw them into the furnace of*

*fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!*

## Romans 8: 12-25

*<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — <sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

*<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Today we begin our 4<sup>th</sup> week in our “God at the Movies” series. Extending the general teaching begun last week with the parable of the sower, this morning we turn to the parable of the weeds found in Matthew 13. Again, Jesus teaches the crowds and then unpacks the parable for the disciples. We also read this morning from Romans 8. Here Paul continues with his discourse concerning the Spirit that lives within us, bringing us freedom from our slavery to sin and making us co-heirs with Jesus Christ. As this process unfolds, Paul reminds us that all of creation groans to be made new again. This week’s movie was the very popular “Finding Nemo”. This Pixar film, released back in 2002, centers around the relationship between Nemo and his father Marlin. In the movie, the theme of parenthood is laid over the emotions of sadness and fragility, of freedom and independence. In the end, love triumphs over all as Nemo is reunited with his father. This will be the ideas we wrestle with this morning as we delve into how God finds us and frees us. As we begin, let us start with a word of prayer, inviting God’s presence to be among us. Let us pray...

This morning we begin with the parable of the weeds. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus shares a parable that immediately follows and is connected to last week’s parable on the sower. Last week we looked at the four soils that represented differing states of readiness to hear and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as well as at our call to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all we meet. Three-fourths of the soils, you might recall, were hard or rocky or thorny. These were the folks who hear the word of God, but the message is ignored or is quickly crowded out by the worries and cares of the world. In today’s parable, the farmer sows good seed in his field. Seeds are planted; growth is awaited.

The normal expectation would be the good crop yield that Jesus spoke of last week – one hundred, sixty, or thirty times as much as had been planted. In the opening scenes of “Finding Nemo” this is the hundreds and hundreds of eggs laid by Coral. As Marlin and Coral look at the eggs, they dream of the large family that they will soon have “in just a few days”. Tragically a predator cuts this dream short. Only one egg survives. Marlin, now a singly parent, nurtures and protects this egg. Soon Nemo is born. Life begins, full of hope and possibility.

In today’s parable the wheat seeds are sown. But an enemy slips in at night and plants weed seeds. As both seeds sprout, the weeds, or “tares” in some translations, would be almost indistinguishable from the wheat in the early stages of development and growth. Eventually growth would reveal their true nature. The weeds left by the enemy are seen as a threat to the harvest. In “Finding Nemo”, Marlin was so protective of little Nemo. He saw the ocean as full of dangers and tried to protect Nemo at all costs. His instinct was to always be present, to hide from or shoo away any danger. In the parable, the workers first instinct is to pull up the weeds. It is the same instinct – remove or keep away from all the bad. But the farmer both wiser and more patient. Pulling up the weeds now will damage the young wheat plants too. Instead, he instructs the workers to wait until harvest time. At that point they will first pull the weeds – bundling and burning them. Then they will harvest the wheat, gathering it into the barns. Here, in the context of the day, Jesus is prohibiting the disciples from retaliating against their enemies. Jesus is telling them indirectly that judgment belongs to God alone. But sometimes it is so hard to leave well enough alone.

As the opening scenes of the movie unfold, it becomes time for Nemo to begin school. Nemo is full of questions and so eager to learn. A very, very tentative Dad watches as Nemo heads off with Mr. Ray and his school of young fish. Marlin lurks on the edge as the young class is allowed to explore a little bit on their own. As Nemo and his newfound friends explore the edge of the vast ocean, they egg each other a little further and further out. When Marlin sees Nemo out in the open ocean, it is more than he can take. He tugs Nemo back to safety – instead of allowing him to explore his new world. The danger is more than Marlin can take. He wanted to pull away from the evils of the deep. But his overprotective instinct drives a wedge between he and Nemo. An angry Nemo tells Dad, “I hate you”. Nemo defiantly swims to the boat. It is in the open sea that he is caught by a diver. Their separation begins. Marlin’s quest to find his son then begins as he meets fellow fish Dori. She suffers from – what was it again? Oh yes, short term memory loss.

As Jesus unpacks the parable in private with his disciples, as he did in last week’s passage from Matthew, he interprets what the meaning truly is. The sower is Jesus, the field is the world. Just as it was last week, Jesus sowed seeds everywhere he went. The good seeds – the wheat – are the children of God. The bad seed – the weeds – are the children of evil one. They exist together in the world, often living side by side. This is the experience of Marlin and Dori as they seek their way to Sydney to find Nemo. They meet Bruce the shark (who is both good and evil), the school of fish that ultimately gives them directions to the East Australia Current, Crush the giant tortoise who guides and provides Marlin with some key parenting advice, and Nigel the pelican who plays a key role in saving

Nemo and reuniting father and son. They also deal with the jellyfish and with the evil niece Darla, known as "fish killer" by the fish in the tank. Good and evil continue to abound in our world. We must make wise decisions regarding our interaction with or avoidance of evil in the world. And just as it was with Marlin early in the movie, our temptation can be to judge others who we "think" or "feel" are bad or evil or who are doing things wrong. Being judgmental is a sin that many of us wrestle with.

In the parable from Matthew, Jesus makes it clear that judgment or the sorting of the good from the evil is God's task. At the second coming of Jesus, as the angels head out across the earth, they will first gather all the evil in the world. They will be *"collected and burned up with fire... where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"*. Then the righteous will be left to *"shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"*. This lines right up with the general account concerning the end times that we read in the Book of Revelation. Turning to our passage from Romans 8, Paul begins by addressing our choices concerning the good or evil that we face. In addition, as we delve deeper into the passage, Paul speaks of the challenge we often experience when dealing with the sufferings of this present age.

Beginning in verse twelve, Paul continues the dialogue that we have been looking at the past two weeks. In this verse Paul reminds us that we are called to *"live by the Spirit"*, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. We are also reminded that when we live by the Spirit that we are living as children of God. As

children of God, believers enjoy an intimate, personal relationship with God. Because of this close relationship, we are closely connected to the Holy Spirit. It is this connection that allows us to live a life in Christ. We are no longer captive to our own sinful thoughts or desires. Using Paul's words, we are not captive to a *"spirit of slavery to fall back into fear"*. Instead, we receive a *"spirit of adoption"*. As children adopted into the family of God, the Spirit bears witness to our place in the family. Paul goes on to proclaim that if we are children of God then we are also *"heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"*. I do not know about you, but to be heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ sounds pretty good. When one thinks of the promises of God and of what our eternity looks like as a child of God, it is good to be an heir. Overall, it really is pretty good. But then we read the rest of verse seventeen. Here we are reminded that we will be heirs *"if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him"*. Oh. Suffer?

As Marlin and Dori work their way towards Sydney, there are moments of excitement – when they are making progress and feel like they are getting closer and closer. One such moment is when Marlin wakes up on the back of Crush, the sea tortoise. He soon realizes that he is traveling on the current that will take them to Australia. As the newborn sea tortoises are playing, Crush' son Squirt slips out of the fast-moving current. Immediately the overprotective Marlin's instincts kick in and he panics. Crush tells Marlin to "chill". This does not compute for Marlin. He wants to go and rescue Squirt, just like he tried to do with Nemo. He asks Crush how he knows Squirt is ready for the big ocean. Crush replies that he does not know. But he does know that Squirt knows when he is ready. Crush has learned to trust his son. Marlin realizes his shortcoming then.

This brings him a feeling of dejection and sadness. There are times when Marlin suffers – especially when he recognizes that he is partly responsible for the suffering that he is now enduring. We too are like that, aren't we? I can recall times when I have made a poor choice – maybe some harshly spoken words or maybe a time when I have made a decision that was not the best. As I have had to live with the consequences of my choices, I have felt feelings of remorse and guilt. But I was also keenly aware that I was where I was because of myself. I suffered but I knew I should suffer. Most of the time, this has led to learning and to growth. Pondering Crush's wise words, Marlin now understood how to be a better father – if he ever found Nemo.

Paul continues on, in verses 18 through 25, to remind us that our current suffering, whatever that may be, is not worth comparing to what we will experience when we enter heaven. In a similar way, Marlin would have gone through the trials and sufferings of his trek to find Nemo a thousand times to experience the joy he felt when finally reunited with his son. That is but a shadow of the joy we will feel when we stand face to face with our Lord. In the meantime, we wait with *"eager longing"* to be set free from our *"bondage to decay"*. As we wait, we *"groan inwardly"* as we long for the redemption of our bodies. The groaning that Paul refers to is a frustrated and deep longing to be freed from the difficulties and sufferings of this life. The Holy Spirit is, for you and for me, God's promise that he will see his work through to completion in each of us. During this life, we live in the tension between the "already" of being redeemed in this life and the "not yet" of the glory to be revealed. As children of God, we wait with hope. We have a glimpse of the glory that will be revealed.



In verse 24, Paul reminds us, "*in hope... we were saved*". My friends, it is in hope – in Christ – that we are saved. It is also in hope that we wait for our final redemption as we transition from this life to the next. Paul closes our passage for today by reminding us how we wait. In verse 25 we read, "*we wait for it with patience*". That can be hard, right? To wait with patience? I do not know about you, but patience does not come naturally to me. It is a challenge to me to be a person who practices patience all the time.

Although he struggles a couple of times, overall, Marlin does exhibit patience in his long search for his son Nemo. Most of his patience is allocated on Dori, his traveling partner. As his search extends over many days and across the ocean, it is Marlin's love for his son that drives both his patience and his perseverance. Near the end of the movie, Dori and Marlin are swallowed by a huge whale. Just as his hope is beginning to fade, Dori provides a spark of hope. As Marlin thinks they are about to travel down into the belly of the whale to become food, she tells him that it is "time to let go". Against every instinct in his body, Marlin joins Dori in letting go. They fall down into the water within the whale – and are blown out the blowhole – right in Sydney harbor. Perhaps the whale has also heard the great story of the adventure that Marlin has been on to find his son. As the length of the trip grew, so did the tale of Marlin's love for Nemo. With renewed hope they begin to search for the boat that took Nemo away. But. But. But. It is then that one of Nigel the pelican's friends swallows up Marlin and Dori. But they do not go down without a fight. Hope is strong now that they feel so close to finding Nemo. Nigel comes to the rescue and brings them to the dentist's office where Nemo sits in a bag, ready to go to Darla the fish killer.

As Marlin and Dori look out from Nigel's beak, they see what appears to be a dead Nemo. He is pretending to be dead – so that he won't have to go with Darla but will be flushed down the toilet. He remembered that Gill said all drains lead to the ocean. Heartbroken, Nigel returns Dori and Marlin to the open ocean. After a couple more tear-jerker moments, Marlin and Nemo are finally reunited. It is then that Nemo tells his Dad, "I don't hate you". All is restored as father and son are once again a team. Both have been changed by their experiences. One is a better father and one is a better son. And Dori is still the same old Dori.

In our journey of faith, it too is our Father who first finds us. The Lord reaches out to each of us, sometimes planting several seasons of seeds before one finally takes root and begins to grow faith in us. God the Father does not ever give up. God keeps working and working to connect with each of his children. The love that drove Marlin across a vast ocean is but a flicker of the love that God has for each of us. As God finds us and draws us into relationship, we are freed from the worries and concerns of this world. As we grow to live more and more by the Spirit, the things of the flesh fall away. Yes, at times the weeds do creep in and take root in our lives. That is our reality. Yet we also hold onto hope, knowing that the Lord, in his abundant mercy, will free us from the bonds of sin in this life. We also wait with an eternal hope, trusting that one day Christ will free us from the chains of death as well. For the hope and promise we have in Christ and for the way God continues to find us and free us over and over again, today we say thanks be to God. Amen.