

Ever had the experience of passing through some cataclysmic event in life and pinching yourself on the other side of it to see if you're still alive? And that doesn't necessarily have to describe a bad experience; yet many of us have been tested with genuinely traumatic incidents that have changed the lens we view life through. But there are also life-pinching moments that come from great joy; times when life is brimming over with bliss and wonder; when you are ecstatically in love with every heart-beating moment of life that is purely full of goodness and purpose. We will share one of those heart-beating moments in just a bit when we baptize little Gia, and that moment will be significantly charged with an acknowledged awareness of God's love in our lives and overwhelming welcome to us. And in the wake of hearing this text, it may seem a bit of a stretch to get there—from *gnashing of teeth* to a peace within that will spread a common smile across our faces when we share God's welcome with her; but I believe the essence of this text is peace; true peace of heart and mind that lays deep within and steadies our lives like nothing else can.

That peace is there for any to have. It comes from God; begins with an understanding that God is greater in every way than we are yet even with that advantage over us and over all creation, God chooses to be in relationship with us; chooses to love us; preserve us; walk with us; even chooses to be at work in our lives and through our lives. I was driving down Front Street last week and was aware of one of those mechanical "chairs" stopped on the sidewalk with a driver on it, and with a pedestrian there with them kneeling down and working with one of the front wheels. Whatever had happened, the chair was freed, and went traveling on down the sidewalk, and the walker went on in their own direction and as simple as that, there was an example of God's choice to work through us—to be kind; to be helpful to one another; to look out for the one who may not be as able to look out for themselves. There was the "wheat" bearing fruit in the full fresh air fineness of that day!

Every single day of our lives brings those opportunities—those possibilities in life that begin with an attitude of kindness towards others. But even though we live to be God's agents of "good," things are not always rosey; the path is not always an easy one to find or to follow. You may have read the article in the paper this past week about the young woman who was scamming, in many cases, the elderly in Olean with her tale of woe and taking advantage of the kindness of people who gave her money to help her out. I wish I could return every dollar to them, but I hope they are not bitter or embarrassed for having responded. The goodness of God does not always accomplish the desired result, and yet the act is there for all to see—that act of kindness towards another.

Jesus had something to say about situations like that. Remember when he sent the disciples out on their own missions of mercy and told them they were like sheep going into the midst of wolves—*so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves*, he said. There's bound to be frustration even as the work of the kingdom is carried on; bound to be scammers; nay-sayers; idlers and thieves, but God's good will still be done; will still be known, will still be the *fruit*, refreshing, and nourishing and ripening golden in the field where God's people live with kindness and with mercy.

Jesus saw our lives—the followers of his—filled with possibility for God's kingdom. He also recognized that not everyone would participate...that there would be hardy weeds amongst the healthy grain. But he didn't want us to get hung up over that—become focused on what was "not" good; not even the "who!" That is not what we are to

be about. That is not our calling; not work for us to do. In fact, it is special work—reserved for the reapers—the angels, he said. They are the experts at separating the weeds from the grain—not us! It is enough for us to grow in the light of God’s love and care and tend to the things that God gives us to do. We don’t need to be sifting through life with our sharp tongues and critical attitudes, separating the wheat from the tares. Only God sees the heart. Only God knows.

So where is the great “essence” of peace? It’s there in staying on task—on God’s given task of bearing this life of ours with kindness; with understanding; with a sense of responsibility for one another that is good and nourishing and helpful; with an attitude that is willing. There is peace of heart and mind when you are able to be helpful to another human being. There is peace when you can let go and just obey the voice of God within you, because it is there and will be there, telling you what to do. And there is peace in something else that is not in this specific text, but is very much a part of what Matthew wants to tell his readers about Jesus. Matthew’s story begins with the name of the baby who comes to Joseph and Mary—a baby to be named *Emmanuel*—meaning, *God with us*. Matthew closes his story about Jesus with Christ’s own words to his followers that he will be *with them to the end of the age*.

Spiritually, Christ is with us; present in our hearts and minds and lives as we live each and every day. It is Christ’s love and kindness and patience with life and with others that fills our own desire to help one another; our own desire to live our lives for the good of God’s kingdom. And even if we can’t explain it, we can see the evidence of it—in the good we see in others—their “fruit” produced for the glory of God and we can know the evidence of it when we respond ourselves with the “good” God would have us be and do in this world. Spiritually, Christ is within our hearts—that deep, steady hand in our lives; the peace of God’s eternal purpose in this world at work even in the midst of what is not good. We have no need to fear—the past, or the present or the future. Jesus is right here, right now—our peace and joy; and we will stand together here and affirm that fact, as we baptize this baby among us.

Remember this day, the next time you find yourself doing your “good” for another. Remember this day, when you become frustrated or overwhelmed by the world around you that seems anything but good. Because on this day, we proclaim the good of God for this world as we welcome Gia into this family; as we share the good hope of God’s love among us alive in her heart. May God’s will be our own, ever given with humble service. And may we be at peace—a stillness deep with in, as we sink our roots deeper into the mercy of God’s love. Amen.

“Wheat and Tares—at peace” Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 072008 Mkh