

THE SERMON RANDY WOULD HAVE PREACHED
October 28, 2012 –Memorial-Reformation Sunday –Matthew 13: 24-30
The Church of the Covenant

Our dear friend and brother, our Associate Pastor, Randy Boyer, did interesting things for recreation. One of which was to read the entire Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, which many consider to be dry as dust, during the 500th Anniversary year of the death of John Calvin. Calvin many believe is the true Father of the Presbyterian Church. Another of his favorite pastimes, Randy's that is, not Calvin's, was then to discuss and debate these things with random people like me. One of the things I miss the most after Randy passed away last February were these great discussions about weighty matters in ministry. I remember a particularly interesting series of discussions we had on the nature of the church, particularly as it was set in the context of some churches seeking to leave the Presbyterian denomination. We discussed the fourth book of Calvin's Institutes at length. The chapters on the visible and invisible church. The sections on what constitutes a true church. And the Bible verses which serve as the basis for this sermon today. I wrote down a whole series of notes on this in my sermon notebook. I think one of the sadnesses in Randy's passing was all the sermons that were in his heart that he never got to preach. So today, in a way, this is one of those: The Sermon Randy Would Have Preached.

Because simplistically speaking, we Protestants are the product of the Protestant Reformation --that which we celebrate today with bagpipes and tolling bells. Our forebears disagreed profoundly with the church of that day; we broke away from that church; Simplistically speaking then, it would seem as Protestants that whenever we profoundly disagree about something it is in our DNA to break away, form our own church, and go our own separate way. Protestants, Presbyterians and those in the Reformed Tradition then supposedly are people who get angry and leave when they disagree; this is a supposedly good thing; this is who we are. Not so, according to John Calvin; not so, according to his Calvin's Institutes; not so, according to scripture; not so, according to Randy.

According to Calvin, the true marks of the true church are the preaching of the Word of God and of the Gospel and the sacraments rightly ministered. Calvin writes: *"Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."* (Institutes, IV., I, 9) And within this church are, according to our scripture, both "wheat" and "tares"; there are both those who are elect and those who are not elect; there are those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ; there are those on a membership list and there are those whose name is written in the Book of Life by Jesus; there are those who are going to heaven and those who are not going to heaven. There is the "visible" outward church, all the people gathered on a Sunday morning, that we can see; ah, but there is the "invisible church" which is known only to God alone and whom God alone can see. According to Calvin, to separate oneself, or to seek to separate one's church, from the rest of the Body of Christ, from the rest of the visible church, is *"the denial of God and Christ"*. (Institutes IV., I, 10) So if people seek to separate for reasons anything less than the improper preaching of the Word of God or administration of the sacraments, actually, it is they who sin and bring reproach and condemnation upon themselves; not the people from whom they seek to separate. The three scriptures which Calvin cites are: the net in which all kind of fish are gathered but are not sorted out until the boat reaches the shore (Matthew 13: 47-58); the wheat and the chaff that are not sorted out until they are sifted on the threshing room floor (Matthew 3:12); and our scripture parable for today, the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13: 24-30). Let those who have an ear, hear; and those who have an eye to see, see.

Jesus' *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares* as it is often referred to, uses what is sown into the field of the church as illustration of what the present Kingdom of God is like, versus, what the future Kingdom of God is like. You will recall from the previous two sermons in this series that the Kingdom of God is both future, it is coming when Jesus comes a second time, and it is present, it breaks into the world with a foretaste of what that future Kingdom is like. But this parable that Jesus teaches, teaches us that what is present is different from what is to come; the present inbreaking of the Kingdom as it is experienced in the church, is different from what will be the actual establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth when all of history is at an end. Jesus begins this parable by saying: *"The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but...his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat..." (Matthew 13: 24-25)* So the reality of the church is that there are both wheat and weeds present within it; there are both wheat and tares in the field that is the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then the servants (that's us) of the householder (that's Jesus) come to Jesus and ask: *"Then do you want us to go and gather them (the weeds/ the tares)?" (v. 28)* The servants ask Jesus, do you want us to weed the tares out of your garden, Lord? And any good gardener knows you need to weed the garden in order to make it grow. But evidently Jesus wants us to be bad gardeners of His garden, because He says: *"No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."* (v. 29) Don't weed the garden of the church because in the process you'll root up the wheat as well.

When Christians turn on other Christians, no matter the altruistic motive, it is always ugly. It offends the witness to the unbelieving world of the Lord Jesus Christ. It creates unseemly headlines; it creates division where there should be reconciliation in Christ. It confirms every bad and negative stereotype that the world has of the church; that it is judgmental and self-righteous and mean-spirited. And in the process the world is turned away from being part of the church (some of the wheat gets pulled up when you seek to pull up some of the tares); and some of the people of the church who are wheat, get turned off, their faith becomes destroyed by the infighting, and some of the wheat is lost in the process of pulling up the weeds. Not worth it, says Jesus, *"let them both grow together (the wheat and the tares) until the harvest, and---I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."* (v. 30) You see, there is a day coming when JESUS will judge between the quick and the dead, will sift the wheat and the tares, the saved and the condemned. --Those who go to heaven and those who are thrown into the unquenchable lake of fire. HE is the judge and we are not. He knows the hearts of men; we do not. We see the outward appearance, as the Bible says, but the Lord sees our heart. It is not for us even to know who is wheat and who is tare; it is not in our job description; judgment alone is reserved to the Almighty. So, by the way, if we were judging, we would probably pull up wheat along with the tares; and we would leave some tares in there that we assumed were wheat. Because we're not God. We would get it wrong. God is God alone.

Someone says, O but the Bible says we may also know them by their fruits, by the outcomes of their life. True, we may know the outward fruit produced by someone's life; but still only God can know someone's heart. Whether the fruit was produced by a good or an evil heart, only God knows. So don't be going around pointing at people following the service, saying, he's wheat...she's a tare. Or you obviously missed Jesus' point in His parable completely.

The sin of those who seek to divide the church is that they seek to occupy the throne of God and judge between the wheat and the tares. But, beloved, you may trust me on this, the Sovereign God still sits upon the throne. He has not moved from His place. And He will not take kindly to those who seek to usurp His throne.

King David was an interesting character in the Bible. He was referred to as “*A man after God’s own heart.*” But he sinned. He was imperfect. He did many things that were contrary to God’s will. He sowed discord in his own Kingdom. Not always was good fruit born by the life of David. If you judged him we might judge him as a weed. But God nevertheless still always chose David, never un-chose him, and indeed promised in an unbreakable covenant that someone in David’s lineage would always sit on the throne of Israel. This promise is now fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, born of the house of David, sitting on the throne of the New Israel, His Church. But at one point King David said that he would rather be judged by God, who is merciful, than to be judged by men, who are not. That’s why judgment is always reserved for God. That’s why we ought not judge, lest we be not judged in that day when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. That’s why human beings are utterly incapable of making a distinction like who is in and who is not in, where the Kingdom of God is concerned.

By the way, someone thinks the grass is greener...and without tares...on the other side. So you go over there only to discover it is also filled with wheat and tares, just as Jesus said. Grass is not greener on the other side –it has weeds, too.

Randy had little patience with people who thought they were the reincarnation of John Calvin but had never bothered to read let alone understand what John Calvin wrote. Nor of people who claimed to know the scriptures but only those that justified their own actions. And conveniently forgot scriptures like the wheat and the tares. Nor of people who thought they were holier and wiser and a better judge than God.

I’m glad I don’t have to worry myself about deciding who is wheat and who is tare. I have more important things to do. And I can leave that to a perfectly just and perfectly merciful Holy and Sovereign God. And so should you. That’s the sermon I believe Randy would have preached.

I miss Randy so. He always seemed to be able to cut through all the tares to get to the heart of the wheat. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg (with notes from conversations with the Rev. Randall V. Boyer),
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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!