

Good Guys and Bad Guys

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Most of the storylines we have been taught are that there are good guys and bad guys. The good guys are on the side of justice, righteousness, and law and order. The bad guys, on the other hand, are on the side of evil, lawlessness, and chaos. The implication is that as people who are presumably on the good side, we have every right to judge, punish, and discard the bad guys. We need to take justice into our own hands.

In our Scripture readings today, God is saying to us, ‘not so fast. Even though that’s how you operate and/or how you think I should operate, that is not my approach.’

In our first reading from the Book of Wisdom, the author tells us that God has ‘care for all’ and is ‘lenient to all.’ Note the emphasis on all. ‘All’ includes the so-called bad guys, along with the good guys.

Then, in our second reading, St. Paul to the Romans reminds us that none of us is perfect, but God is OK with that, for as he says, “the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.” It is true that God not only can work with good, but can even work to bring good out of bad.

Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus tells a parable that is hard for us to hear: the parable of the weeds in the field. In it, both the weeds and the wheat grow together. When asked by the workers if they should go out and pull up the bad weeds, which presumably would be the right

thing to do, the householder says, 'no, let them grow together.' He continues, 'if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them.' God, like the householder, allows both the good and the bad to grow together for the time being.

From a scriptural perspective, the storyline of the good guys versus the bad guys is misleading. Even though that is what we were taught, the truth is that the line between the good and the bad isn't that clear-cut. In fact, the line doesn't go between us and others, but goes down right through our own hearts. While we hope that the good in us outweighs the bad, there is a mixture of good and bad within each of us. The struggle is within. That is important for us to acknowledge, lest we keep projecting our badness onto others.

God doesn't see the world as the good guys versus the bad guys, but as all humanity struggling with similar issues.

Am I able to see both the good and the bad in myself and others without resorting to judging people as either totally good or totally bad?

Instead of putting all of our efforts into finding out who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, let us be more like householder in the parable. Let us allow the weeds and the wheat to grow together. One day, at the end of the world, the angels of God will take care of separating the good guys and the bad guys. But until then, like God, let us take the path of leniency.