

In April of 1988 I was studying for my comprehensive exams as part of my doctoral studies at Johns Hopkins. For those unfamiliar with “comps” they were four all-day, written exams covering the four areas of history I had concentrated on, and one oral exam conducted by the four professors of those topics. I had spent two years taking classes and all spring studying for the tests. Comps week was exhausting for me and my classmates. And, so, when I completed (and passed!) the last exam and was finally done with class work – it was time to celebrate.

My best friend and classmate Eliga and I decided we would go to the beach the next day. It was now summer, after all! School was out for us. There was nothing on our calendars until the Fall. We got up the next day, put on shorts and t-shirts and headed for the beach.

Except that it was only late April. It wasn't really summer, and it was raining steadily as we left Baltimore. But we couldn't wait for another day. We knew that it would have to clear up for us because it felt so right that we celebrate that very day. We decided to go to

Chincoteague, Virginia. Eliga had been there once and said it was a good beach town. The only problem was that it was about a four-hour drive from Baltimore. No matter – it was summer! We were on a cool vacation road trip! And so we drove – and we drove. The rain hadn't let up. But surely it would by the time we got to the beach.

It didn't. When we finally arrived in Chincoteague we were very tired. The beach-town was deserted; after all, it wasn't summer, yet. We ate lunch at a small restaurant, but then we were stuck. It was still raining. Defiantly, we walked down to the water, but turned around, drenched. Eventually, irrationally feeling ill-used by the lack of sun, we got in our car and started the long, four-hour drive back home.

In today's gospel Jesus tells the parable of the wheat and the weeds describing the mixture of grace and sin, saints and sinners, in the world. The parable asks us to accept the pace and patience of God, who is represented by the Master. His servants want to uproot the weeds immediately, but the Master says, "No . . . let them grow together until

the harvest.” This seeming patience with sin and sinners is aimed at preserving all the wheat possible. But it’s difficult to appreciate and imitate God’s patience when it comes to the effects of sin in our world. We want blessings and help from God – now!

But God is in no hurry to bring in the harvest. He will wait for the order of the seasons. Throughout His parables – think of the Sower, the Mustard Seed, the vine and branches, the fig tree – Jesus uses the growth of plants to illustrate God’s action in the world. And His pace of action might be called “botanical.” Have you ever observed the growth of plants? In the present moment nothing seems to happen, but looking back it’s easy to see dramatic change as leaves bud, stems grow, fruit ripens. That is the pace God usually works at. It can be like watching the grass grow – or, in this case, the wheat. It frustrates us.

Here I come back to my road trip to Chincoteague. Trying to force Summer to come out on our own schedule hadn’t worked very well. But that is what we were trying to do. This was all irrational on one

level, but we just couldn't wait for summer. And we thought it was unreasonable that we should have to. It was so right that we should rejoice in our freedom! We were determined that summer would come, but it wasn't time yet. We were trying to live at the wrong pace.

Think about all the ways we constantly want to rush God's action and judgment. We think we know what's best for our children, spouses, nation, world, Church. Why doesn't God do something about them right now, while I'm praying!? Why doesn't God convert my spouse, heal my child, save the country? We want good things. We see sin and hurt all around, so let's get out there and uproot the weeds!

But, while we can all see that there are weeds in the world, only the Master can see beyond the present sin and season within persons, nations, the Church. The servants are quick to want to take the uprooting and judgment into their own hands. And there is a role we do play in praying for good intentions and combating sin. But the fruit won't come on our schedule. There will be waiting involved.

Until that harvest time we, the Master's servants, are told to live and share the gospel. Jesus never commands us to judge or weed people out on His behalf. He tells us to go make Disciples, praying for the weeds, loving them patiently and without loss of hope that they'll become wheat, in this season before the harvest. And so we must not lose patience, give up, or take God's "Not yet" to mean "never."

What weeds do you want to uproot in your own world? Don't despair of them when they don't change, reform, convert right away. When Eliga and I arrived back in Baltimore that evening we were both exhausted. We hadn't forced summer to come early after all. It wasn't time yet. But it's important to note: it did eventually come. The summer of 1988 came in its own ordered time – and it was beautiful. Let us trust God's pace with the harvest and the seasons. They are His. We are His. He is patient with all of us. Thanks be to God.