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SOW HARMONY NOT DISCORD!

Today's Text: Matt. 13: 24- 30

Extracts:

Another parable [Jesus] put forth to them, saying: “the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this’ [Matt. 13: 24- 28]

On 18 March 2009, an outbreak of swine flu was confirmed in Mexico.¹ The swine flu is a respiratory disease that is caused by influenza type A that infects pigs but has now infected humans. It can be spread from person to person, probably through coughing and sneezing. By 21 April 2009, 2 cases were discovered in California, USA, Mexico's northern neighbour. By 3 May 2009, the flu had been confirmed in 20 countries around the world, including El Salvador and Costa Rica in Latin America, USA and Canada in North America, Spain and Germany in Europe, and South Korea, Hong Kong and Israel in Asia. In all cases, those affected had either been to Mexico or had been in contact with people who had been there.

A small flu outbreak in a little village in Oaxaca State in Mexico has in a matter of weeks spread into a pandemic affecting millions of people around the world. Discord is like that. A “harmless” seed of lies or half-truths can soon sprout and spread to disrupt harmony in a marriage or family, church or work place or even among nations. In no time, we grow a crisis or conflict that soon gets out of control. That is why among the seven things that God hates are “a false witness who speaks lies and one who sows discord among brethren” [Prov. 6: 16-19].

This week's study examines this critical subject. Do you sow harmony or discord? What is the cost of sowing discord? How can this weed that you sow on other people's fields or vice versa be uprooted? Let us find out!

¹ Based on “Mexico to begin lifting flu curbs,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8021547.stm> and “Outbreak map,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8021958.stm>

1. Sowing discord: What were you thinking?

Discord occurs when there is a lack of agreement, leading to conflict or strife or incompatibility between persons or groups on a matter (or matters) of mutual interest. By that definition, discord is a daily occurrence once human beings meet and interact. For example, husbands and wives can easily disagree over where to squeeze the toothpaste tube that is in their bathroom! Christians and Moslems do not agree on the concept of God. Conservatives and liberals fight over the political direction their country should take. Even the earthly ministry of Jesus was a major source of discord to the religious leaders of His time. That was why He said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household” [Matt. 10: 34-36; Of: Mic. 7: 6].

So, discord may be good or bad, depending on the motive behind it. Let us consider the following scenarios:

a) *Good discord: When you disagree with what is wrong*

You may find yourself in a situation at home, work, business or place of worship, where principles of proper conduct or laws and regulations are violated or not upheld. If you keep quiet and do nothing about it, you are vicariously liable when things go wrong. You are one of those destroying that place or relationship. But if and when you speak out, you may be branded a trouble-maker and persecuted. That is an example of good discord. In due course, you will be vindicated.

Take the case of Aaron while Moses was away on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God. After God had empowered Moses to force Pharaoh’s hand to let the children of Israel leave bondage in Egypt, He made Aaron Moses’ prophet, that is, mouthpiece or spokesman [Ex. 7: 1-2]. When Moses delayed his return from the mountain (Mount Sinai) to which he had brought them to receive the Ten Commandments, the people came to Aaron and asked him to make them gods that would go before them [Ex. 32: 1]. Perhaps out of cowardice or the need to promote harmony, he acquiesced and made them a molten calf, and said to them, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt.” He even went on to build an altar and proclaimed a feast [vv. 2-5]. Rather than promote harmony, that act of acquiescence led to a major moral discord with God from which the children of Israel hardly recovered.

Compare that with Jeremiah’s running battle with the kings of Judah. When God called and anointed him as a prophet, He told him that he would go “to all” that He would send him and “whatever “ God commanded, that he would speak [Jer. 1: 4-7]. Therefore, Jeremiah

warned Judah that, on account of their idolatry and wickedness, the people would go into exile in Babylon for seventy years, and that those who refused to go would be the worse for it [**Jer. 25: 11-12; 29: 10**]. Rather than see him as the man who had the interest of the country at heart, Jeremiah was branded a traitor and persecuted. For example, when Pashur the priest and chief governor in the house of the Lord heard what Jeremiah had prophesied, he “struck Jeremiah...and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin ... by the house of the Lord” [**Jer. 20: 1-2**]. During the reign of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, the priests, prophets and all the people seized Jeremiah and dragged him before the house of the Lord, alleging, “This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears” [**Jer. 26: 1-11**]. That raised a major discord because there were some princes and people who felt that Jeremiah had spoken the truth of God, and they saved him from instant death [**vv. 16-24**]. His enemies even set up false prophets like Hananiah to proclaim an opposing message from God [**Jer. 28: 1-3**]. Jeremiah remained undeterred. When King Jehoiakim burnt the book where he had recorded his prophetic messages, God dictated a more detailed one that his scribe, Baruch, wrote down [**Jer. 36: 1-32**]. In the end, Jeremiah was vindicated. God’s mercy for Judah came as He had revealed to Jeremiah and his detractors died or suffered. That is an example of good discord!

b) *Bad discord: When you set out for mischief*

We may disagree with others, not because they are wrong but because the position such people support or defend threatens our status or interests. For example, a corrupt politician who has won his past elections through rigging will resist any attempt at electoral reforms aimed at promoting transparency and free and fair elections. A pastor that is misappropriating church funds will not be enthusiastic about outsourcing bookkeeping to a professional company. Some people will sow lies to separate friends or allies just to divide opposition and make it possible for them to have their way.

Take the example of Demetrius, the silversmith who made silver shrines of the Greek goddess, Diana, that brought him and his colleagues much profit [**Acts 19: 24**]. Following the signs and wonders that God worked through Paul’s ministry at Ephesus, many magicians believed, brought out their books and burned them. The items burnt were worth up to fifty thousand pieces of silver [**vv. 16-19**]. Demetrius called his fellow craftsmen together and said, “You know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So *not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute*; but also the

temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised, and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship” [vv. 25-27].

Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen cried out, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” The whole city “was filled with confusion.” Some cried one thing; some cried another. They rushed into the theatre and seized Paul’s companions. But for the intervention of the city clerk, they might have lynched them on the spot [vv. 28-41]. You can see how much Demetrius embellished the story with lies and half-truths but the message was clear: in his heart, he had mischief against Paul and his team for introducing the liberating message of Christ to a captive market. That was a mortal threat to his business.

This week’s study addresses bad *discord* that is *aimed at causing mischief and disharmony for our selfish and, mostly, unholy gains*. God hates it and we should.

2. How we sow discord

The parable used by Jesus gives us very useful clues on how we sow discord among others. Note the following:

a) *Discord sowers are enemies*

The man in the parable planted wheat in his field and “his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat” [Matt. 13: 25]. Tares are a problematic weed that grows among crops thus using up soil nutrients that the crops badly need. Therefore, an enemy does not have at heart the good of the person s(he) is targeting. The word of God warns, “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” [1 Pet. 5: 8]. The thief does not come as a friend but as an enemy to steal, kill or destroy [Jn 10: 10]. Therefore, once you find somebody trying to put a spanner in your wheel of progress, s(he) could be an enemy. Be careful.

Take the case of Nehemiah who had received the mandate of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem [Neh. 2: 6]. As soon as he and his team arrived there, the local dignitaries and officials, led by Sanbalat, “were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel” [v. 10]. Without finding out from the builders the authority and rationale for their reconstruction work, they set out immediately to obstruct them, saying, “Will you rebel against the king?” [v. 19].

b) *They sow on other people’s fields*

In the parable, the enemy did not sow tares on his own field but on another man’s field where he had planted good seed, wheat [Matt. 13: 24-25]. In

like manner, those who want to sow discord among others attack their targets' good points. The lies that they will put on you must fit your profile. For example, if you are a self-confident married professional woman that is friendly and helpful to others, they will plant allegations of infidelity against you. They are supposedly close family or friends who are in a position to know you quite closely. Therefore, your husband should watch out how you smile at your pastor, come home late from work, or feature more frequently these days on trips with your boss. Meanwhile, when you look at the personal lives of such detractors, they are either divorced or confirmed spinsters! It is like an e-mail picture of a fat cat that someone sent to me recently. The cat prayed to God, "Lord, if you cannot make me thin, make all my friends fat too!" Those who sow discord are sowing tares on your wheat field.

c) *They sow behind your back!*

The enemy in the parable came "while men slept." After sowing the tares, he "went his way" [Matt. 13: 25]. The field owner only knew of his enemy's mischief when the wheat and the tares had sprouted [v. 26]. He might have removed the tares before they sprouted if he had known about them beforehand.

People who sow discord operate behind your back. They can hardly confront you or do it in your presence because that may give you the chance to correct misconceptions or errors or challenge their audacity. Secondly, they plant their tares and go their way. In other words, they do not care what happens thereafter. That is why the word of God says, "He who hates disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself. When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart...A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin" [Prov. 26: 24-25, 28].

When Ahab king of Israel wanted a piece of land near his palace for a vegetable garden, the owner of the vineyard, Naboth, refused to sell it to him because it was his inheritance. However, the wicked queen, Jezebel, promised to get it for her husband [1 Kgs 21: 1-7]. She sent letters in her husband's name to the elders and nobles of the city where Naboth lived to proclaim a fast and seat Naboth "with high honour among the people." Then they should procure two scoundrels to bear false witness against him, saying "You have blasphemed God and the king" [vv. 7-10]. The people carried it out as instructed and the innocent man was stoned to death [vv. 11- 16]. The onlookers did not see the hand of the queen or her husband's in that deed, but who then took the poor man's vineyard free of charge?

d) *Therefore, they have no control over the outcome!*

When the man's servants discovered the tares growing with the wheat, they reported the matter to their master, seeking his permission to uproot the weeds. He told them not to worry because in removing the weeds, they could damage his crop. So he instructed them, "Let them both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" [Matt. 13: 27-30].

Discord sowers can only appear to be winning but they ultimately fail. That is because they may actually be fighting against God when they war against you. God may tarry but He will surely act [Hab. 2: 3] Sanbalat and his co-conspirators failed to stop Nehemiah from completing the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, "and they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by (Nehemiah's) God" [Neh. 6: 16]. The city clerk at Ephesus challenged Demetrius and his gang to substantiate their charges against Paul and his men "for you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess" but they had none, and walked away in shame [Acts 19:36-41]. For taking an innocent life, Ahab and his wife came under the curse of God and died prematurely, as prophesied [1 Kgs 21: 42].

3. Conclusion: Harmony is easier to sow than discord!

In this week's bible text, the enemy seemed to have worked harder than the field owner. He had to obtain the weeds from the wild because such things are not sold in shops. He had to come at night to sow them when honest people were fast asleep. He did not come back to check on how successful was his effort for fear of being caught. All that time he spent in another man's field reduced the time for his own good. In the end, all his efforts failed.

According to an African proverb, your feet have to be firmly planted on the ground if you want to prevent another person from reaching the ripe fruits on a tree. That means that you are farther from the fruits than the person you are trying to stop! What sense does it make to work so hard to stop others from making progress only to discover in the end that they are better off than you are? In deed, the way of the transgressor is hard [Prov. 13: 15].

In conclusion, it is better to walk in the steps of Jesus the Christ because His yoke is easy and His burden is light [Matt. 11: 30]. In the world you will have tribulation but in Him you will find peace. Therefore be of good cheer because Jesus has overcome the world [Jn 16: 33]! Sow to the Spirit and reap everlasting life [Gal. 6: 8].

Sow harmony not discord.