

**Sermon Preached July 20, 2014 - Non-Duality & the Parables
Year A, Proper 11
St. John's Episcopal Church
Beverly Farms, Massachusetts
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Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; * darkness and light to you are both alike. [Ps. 139:11]. Amen.

I have a riddle for you today, curtesy of a parishioner. What did the Buddhist say to the hot dog vendor? Make me One with everything. ☺

Now I'd like to ask seriously, what do you think a Buddhist means when she speaks of becoming one with everything? There is a concept in Eastern thought which is referred to as "non-dual consciousness" or "non-duality." It is found in many Eastern religions, most notably Buddhism. Today is part two of my three-part commentary on the parables of Jesus as found in chapter thirteen of the gospel of Matthew. As part of this we will touch a bit on how one defines non-duality, why it might be good to understand it, and how that may help us understand what Jesus was saying.

If you recall, last week we considered that Jesus' main mission was to proclaim the Kingdom of God, or the Reign of God. God's reality which begins in this life and continues in the next. But the Kingdom he is describing is far different from what most of us can even imagine. It is hard to use words in this description because words by their nature limit the reality of God, therefore Jesus uses parables to help us understand the nature of the Kingdom. We looked at how Jesus' parables are not, in fact, easy stories with straightforward morals at the end.

Although they are presented that way, and with a simple reading can be interpreted that way, in reality parables are quite complex. They almost all have strange components within, and twists at the end, which cause us to sit up and pay attention. Parables function more like Buddhist koans than they do morality stories. They are not meant to be obvious, rather, they are more like riddles or word games, meant to shock us out of our complacency and see old things in new ways. God is beyond pat answers and straightforward words.

One reason many theologians today believe that Jesus' parables functioned in this way is because Christianity is, both geographically in its origin and theologically, an Eastern religion. We tend to think of it as Western, but it is not. It was founded in Israel on the continent of Asia. One of the key concepts of many Eastern religions is the idea of non-duality. That is, that there is a connectedness and one-ness of all things. Christians would say that we are one with God, not just humanity, but all of creation.

Dual thinking entered into Christianity in the West as it was understood through the lens of the Platonic Greek world, and further encouraged after the modern Enlightenment. "Dual" thinking is the idea that something has to be "either/or." That it's either good or bad. Right or wrong. It is comparative. Something is always compared to something else, and one of those two things is going to be in and one is out. This way of thinking immediately sets up opposition, judgment, and conflict.

Non-dual thinking is more in line with the Reign of God. The Christian mystic Richard Rohr describes non-dual thinking as "our ability to read reality in a way that is not judgmental, in

a way that is not exclusionary of the part that we don't understand. When you don't split everything up according to what you like and what you don't like, you leave the moment open, you let it be what it is in itself, and you let it speak to you. Reality is not totally one, but it is not totally two, either! Stay with that necessary dilemma, and it can make you wise.”¹

Rohr goes on to speak of where in scripture he finds Jesus speaking of non-duality. He writes, “Jesus’ great line of Unitive Consciousness in the tenth chapter of John’s gospel is, “I and the father are one.” That is the highest level of non-duality, where you have actually overcome the split between yourself and God. For me, that’s the very meaning of the Christ mystery”.²

One can also look at statements Jesus made like, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, “ and “for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” [MT 5:43-48]. My opening prayer was from the 139th psalm “Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; * darkness and light to you are both alike.” These are statements that defy a mindset which likes to separate the world into good and evil. This is non-dual thinking. This is not to say we accept evil, but that we look at it and respond to it through the loving lens of God. We are all, regardless of the evil we have done, part of the good and beloved creation.

¹ <http://tinybuddha.com/blog/non-dual-thinking-there-are-things-we-dont-know/>

² <http://www.soundstrue.com/podcast/transcripts/richard-rohr.php?camefromhome=camefromhome>

This non-dual thinking continues in the earliest Christian theologies. For instance, the understanding that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. Not 50/50, but 100% of both. That is a paradox. But it is also not either/or. Jesus is one with God and one with humanity at the same time.

The theology of the Trinity is also non-dual. God is both three and one. If we start applying modern post-enlightenment approaches to this, it doesn't make sense. It's not logical. It only makes sense with a non-dual perspective, which is beyond logic.

Rohr also wrote, "The world almost always presents itself as a paradox, a contradiction, or a problem—like our themes of "action and contemplation," "Christian and non-Christian," or "male and female" first did. At the mature level, however, we learn to see all things in terms of unitive consciousness, while still respecting, protecting, and working with the very real differences. This is the great—perhaps the greatest—art form. It is the supreme task of all religion."³

There is a greater and greater sense among many theologians and Christians that we cannot fully understand Jesus and the scriptures until we can begin to wrap our mind around non-dualism. It is at the heart of the Reign of God.

Today's parable is, like last week, about farming. A landowner planted wheat, but an enemy planted weeds alongside the wheat. The servants wanted to remove the weeds, but the landowner said no, too much of the good wheat would be lost in the process. Let it go till harvest

³ <https://cac.org/dm-themes>, 7/19/14.

and the reapers will separate it at that time. Again, like last week, the section of the story where the disciples confess to Jesus they have no idea what he is talking about is omitted from the reading. In response Jesus explains one interpretation of the parable.

The parable is confusing to them for several reasons. One is that the problem itself is odd: an enemy planting weeds, using lots of what is probably expensive seeds, in the middle of the night, undetected, was unheard of. Also, the weed that was found is identified as “darnel,” “The owner somehow knows that an enemy has sown the darnel among the wheat, rather than recognizing that darnel is a common plant that inevitably grows most places.”⁴ Finally, the common practice at the time was that weeds would be pulled when they were discovered in a field, not left mixed in. The landowner’s plan to leave the weeds to grow alongside the wheat would have been a strange one. Any follower of Jesus listening to this parable would’ve asked, “Huh????” It makes no sense.

But what if we apply an understanding of non-dualism to the parable? So that now we have a field with both wheat and weeds. Jesus said they represent the children of God versus the children of the evil one. This sounds a lot like dualistic thinking. But his response about what to do about this duality of people is very NON-dual. He doesn’t say get rid of the bad ones, get rid of the weeds. For in doing so some of the good people, the wheat, might be harmed. In fact, we know that the weed darnel looks very similar to wheat. Is Jesus saying perhaps it is hard to tell who exactly is good and who is bad? Or perhaps we are all a mixture of both? Or perhaps we need the bad in order for the good to thrive? He seems instead to be saying that while we like the idea of judging and pulling out all the “bad people” it is not our job to start categorizing people

⁴ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2073, 7/19/14.

in this life. We are not capable of sorting the good from the bad. The rain falls on both the good and the evil and we should let it be. Once we start judging and getting all dualistic, good people will be hurt. We need to recognize ourselves as one crop, respond in love and justice to others, and leave the rest up to God.

When considering dual and non-dual consciousness we might ask ourselves, in what way do we judge others? What sorts of people do we like to judge? What dual thinking can we see in our lives? Can we recognize the oneness that we all share with our divine Creator?

Without the judgment and anger that comes from comparing and finding others lacking or wrong or bad, how might a non-dual worldview bring us peace?

Amen.