

## The Parables and Advent – 2 “Disperse the Mob”

1. We live in a well ordered society. As much as you might think it is a mess, we DO have systems in place to deal with disorder, evil, crime, trespass, or harm to persons or property. This is not something all people have always had in place. In fact, for most of the history of mankind, we had nothing in place. No written set of rights, no written set of laws. You needed a dictator or King and his agents to enforce what laws there were – or to run roughshod over them.
2. In the Western World, we speak of the nobles who confronted King John and let him know that he only ruled England by consent of the nobles and the people. They forced him to sign the Magna Carta, the first official set of laws that all had to obey, and the limits to power that even a king had to agree to.
3. When the British established a police system (Robert Peeler), they were unarmed because they chose to enforce the law by consent of the larger community. The community were, in effect, judges and would decide what behavior was acceptable and what was not. In America, there were “citizens councils” that were nothing more than kangaroo courts and vigilante mobs.
4. The Jews had a different system in place. From the time of Moses, back in Numbers 11, God set up a community, a council, to help him lead the people. All kings have counselors and Moses was not a king so let’s not get too hung up on titles and methods. Here it is, in simplified form: The leaders and the community got along when the leaders understood that the Jews were God’s people, not theirs, and the community agreed upon what rules to enforce and how to enforce them.
5. The Jews were never a monolithic, all of one mind, people. And those differences sometimes gave rise to fierce arguments and even open warfare between followers of God. Because each group felt that it had the truth and only they pleased God, they spent a good amount of time judging other God followers for they sincerely believed that was what God wanted them to do. They were God’s hands to set right what had gone wrong.

6. And then...Jesus came. [Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 12:17-21; 14:4]  
Notice something? Now that Jesus has come, the mob has been dispersed, the councils stripped of their power to enforce the law and exact vengeance, and we have laid down our police powers (the Lord needs people living out their faith in humility and obedience, NOT marshals roaming about making sure others are obedient...and this is new!)
7. Jesus gives us stories to help us with this. Two of them are found in Matthew 13 and that is where we need to spend the rest of the day. [Matthew 13:47-50] I love this parable and it grieves my heart to see it sit, unexamined, untaught, in so many churches. Let's make sure it is taught here.
8. There are a lot of ways to fish with a net. The most efficient way is also one of the most wasteful: the drag net. A net is designed to be pulled behind one or several boats. Depending on the size of the mesh, it gathers in everything in its path. A land based crew awaits the arrival of the boats and, then, the men leap in and, by community effort, pull the net out of the water. It can be quite a hard job for the nets can be full to bursting.
9. Many of the creatures in the net are not suitable for food or sale and, so, they are tossed back into the sea (if lucky) or thrown to the side to die. And this, Jesus says, is like the kingdom of heaven. God's Word has gone out into the world and it will pull many, many different people into it. Some of them will be different enough from you and me that we might wonder if they could be considered Christians at all. We might be concerned about what they believe about this or that point of doctrine. We might be uncomfortable with their worship. We may not feel at ease with the way they apply their faith to the world (politics, hermits, charities, more).
10. But never are the fish allowed to form committees, and empowered to make judgments over which fish belong in the net and which ones don't. The angels will take care of that, not us. We are expressly forbidden from making that kind of judgment (Jesus' log and speck warning, Paul's warning).

11. Jesus will return to this theme in more parables but we will limit ourselves to one more today. [Matthew 13:24-30] This was a common tactic in wars and in territorial disputes among neighbors. Someone would come in and throw the seeds of weeds and invasive plants in the freshly plowed and planted fields of their enemy. It's a supply-chain tactic (people used to burn their fields ahead of the invading force).
12. In politics, in churches, in schools and in our neighborhoods, we want somebody to do something. We want a new law, a shunning, a shaming, and action. And Jesus says...no, it will end up hurting people who are innocent.
13. This is new. In the OT, there were times the faithful were called to battle, to the stoning or banishing of a sinner, to the public shaming of the one who'd done wrong. And then Jesus came and, through parables such as these, he showed us that our world is now forever changed because God has walked here. [Matthew 13:52] We are not throwing away everything – but we are bringing in the new age, the new world. We are heaven's ambassadors.
14. And heaven's attitude toward the weak and broken and sinful and shamed? [Matthew 12:18-21]