

Children of the Kingdom, sermon on July 19, 2026, by Rev. R. Randy Day

Scripture readings: Psalm 139: 1-12, 23-24 and Mathew 13:24-30, 36-43

Wasn't Café Worship fun? And now you say, "Oh my gosh, it's a sermon!" As King Henry VIII said to each of his six wives, "I won't keep you very long."

I'm not preaching from the Gospel reading, but I do want to make a couple of comments. The translation uses the word darnel, which is fine. Other translations simply say weeds. Darnel is a type of weed that mimics wheat, so it would have been almost impossible to separate one from the other. The other thing—and many of you gardeners know this—is that as they grew, their roots became intertwined. If you started pulling out the weeds, you would end up pulling out the wheat as well. What good would that do?

I'm just confessing that I don't particularly like this passage because many translations use the word slaves instead of servants, and passages such as this were used by some churches in America to justify slavery for a very long time. That really irks me. So, I'm going to preach from the Psalms this morning.

I want to pick up where we left off last week. I know many of you weren't here, but we talked about reconciliation. I told you about Dr. Benjamin Rush, who signed the Declaration of Independence and later reached out to Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who had come to hate each other. He convinced them to begin writing letters again, and they continued that correspondence for fourteen years, eventually becoming very good friends. They both died on the Fourth of July, exactly fifty years after the Declaration of Independence was signed.

The whole idea of reconciliation is so important. At the end of that sermon, I challenged you to think about someone in your family, your neighborhood, or somewhere else in your life who might need a little reconciliation—perhaps just a nudge from you or a gentle suggestion.

Several of you told me afterward that reconciliation is difficult. And it is. The Bible tells us that it is that which is broken, that which is fractured, that which is sacrificed, that ultimately leads to healing. In God's way, God's healing is not simply mending. A broken bone is mended. A torn garment is mended. But God's healing is total restoration. Saint Paul says, "If one is in Christ, that person is a new creation." Not simply a mended person, but a new creation. "The old has passed away, and behold, the new has come."

Reconciliation is one of the great themes of the New Testament. I can't say enough about it. But I've heard from many of you, and it is not easy to negotiate reconciliation. Sometimes it's easier just to sit back and let the feud continue. But as I think I said last week—and if I didn't, I should have—now is the time to work on reconciliation. Don't wait until the week before Thanksgiving when everyone starts worrying because Uncle So-and-So is coming for dinner. Now is the time to begin.

This week I came across an article in The Washington Post that I found intriguing. It was called "The Death of the Stick Shift Is Almost Here." Did anybody see that? In our family, especially with my wife and her parents, every child and every grandchild has learned how to drive a stick shift. You never know when you'll be in a foreign country or someone gets sick and you'll have to drive their car. So everyone learned.

But stick shifts are on the way out. The article quoted people saying that automatic cars are kind of boring. Some of you would probably agree with that. Today's cars, thanks to computers, have seven or more gears.

Nobody is shifting seven gears anymore. It's all computerized. We're living in a different era, and manufacturers are simply going to stop making them.

One quote especially caught my attention. It said people don't really use their cars for transportation anymore. They use them as couches. And while they're sitting on the couch, they're checking their phones at stoplights. I'm not kidding. You see it all the time going down Route 3 or Route 6 or wherever you're driving. Everyone is checking their phones and doing something else. The car has become more of a couch than a way to enjoy the journey.

That article reminded me of one of my own experiences with stick shifts. I first learned to drive one on the farm in trucks before I ever got into cars. Years later, while traveling for the United Methodist Church, I was in Johannesburg, South Africa. I needed to get to a Lutheran retreat center about ten miles outside the city. Someone said, "Just rent a car and drive up. It's too far for a taxi."

After a thirteen-and-a-half-hour flight from New York, I went downstairs into the parking garage to pick up the rental car. The first thing I noticed was that the steering wheel was on the other side. It was the British system. I walked around, got in, sat down, and thought, "I can handle this." Then I realized, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to have to shift with my left hand."

By the grace of God, I managed to get out of the parking garage, only to encounter a roundabout immediately. Then came the right turns. In the British system, the right turn is what will get you. You have to make much more space and think everything in reverse. It was a lot to think about while trying to shift gears at the same time. I never rented a car in a foreign country again.

Life has a way of bringing us to those roundabouts, doesn't it? Those difficult turns. Sometimes the waters rise very quickly.

Watching the news this week, my goodness—in Texas and elsewhere, every night it seemed firefighters, rescue workers, and volunteers were pulling people off the tops of cars and houses because floodwaters had risen so quickly. It's frightening how fast the water can come.

Those rising waters also come into our personal lives and into our emotional and spiritual lives. Sometimes the floods come through illness or grief, which we talked about a few Sundays ago. Sometimes they come through uncertainty, family struggles that need reconciliation, or simply the weight of everyday life. Sometimes just commuting to and from work and carrying all the responsibilities of life can wear you down, and you find yourself in a difficult season.

In Isaiah 43:2 we read, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you."

Notice what God does not say. God does not promise that the waters will never come. But when they do come, God promises that we will not be alone. God will not be absent. God will be present with us, even in the midst of tragedy. Isaiah reminds us that God knows us by name and knows how we suffer from all these things—and many more. The list goes on and on. But the God of the Bible is a God who is with us.

Now, for all of you loyal customers here at Café Worship, I'm going to shift gears again.

I know from speaking with many of you that you're deeply concerned about the beauty of Cape Cod, especially our water. Thanks to Susan, we enjoy those beautiful photographs every day. But not every part of the Cape looks as beautiful as those pictures.

I'm going to quote from the "Old Gray Lady." You know what that is? The New York Times. It earned that nickname because, once upon a time, the front page consisted entirely of gray columns of print. There were no pictures—nothing to break up the page. It also became known as the "Old Gray Lady" because, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was considered the nation's paper of record: steady, reliable, and straightforward, unlike the sensational yellow journalism of the day.

Yesterday I picked it up and did a triple take. Above the fold was this huge photograph of the "Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage" on Cape Cod. We all know about them cleaning ponds, and they've received plenty of attention in Massachusetts and even nationally. But when you make the front page of The New York Times, everybody knows about you. I made a photocopy of the article, and you can pass it around after the service.

Cara Buckley spent a day with them, and she writes:

"The pond looked pristine, reflecting the wispy clouds and languid blue of a summertime Cape Cod sky. The women gathered at the edge, but they were not fooled. They had scouted the pond months earlier, and they knew what was held in its depths: hundreds of old beer cans and wine bottles, cracked golf balls, cinder blocks, and wooden pallets."

She continues:

"The women had prepared for this moment, trained for it, passed swimming tests. They set out into the water in life jackets, kayaks, snorkels, and masks—not one of them younger than 65. But trash never stood a chance."

Over the next hour, "The Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage" hauled as much trash from Lovell's Pond in Barnstable as time and space would allow. One participant, a retired school math teacher, said, "You're exhausted. You're maybe a little sunburned. You're filthy, and it's the best feeling you'll ever have."

They're very serious about the quality of our water on Cape Cod. Many of you have raised those concerns with us, and Brad has spoken about them at Council meetings. Every town—Mashpee, Falmouth, and the others—is wrestling with these issues. These women support solving the larger root causes, but at the same time they're saying, "Here's something we can do ourselves." They are caring for God's creation.

One of them said there's such joy in climbing out of the water knowing that the trash is no longer there. Another said, "I always say the turtles and the fish—they're all clapping. They're all thrilled that this stuff is no longer in their home." Don't you just love that? That article will be posted so everyone can read it.

Our Psalm this morning is a beautiful one:

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me."

Those women searched the pond, but God has searched each one of us and knows us completely.

"You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and you are acquainted with all my ways."

None of us really has any secrets from God. Then comes that fascinating phrase:

“You hem me in.”

We often think of being hemmed in as something negative. Someone hems you into a parking space or boxes you in. But here the Psalm says, “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.”

The hand of God rests upon each one of us.

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.”

The psalmist says, “I cannot contain it.”

“If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest parts of the sea,”—or perhaps the pond—“even there you are with me.”

That is the God the psalmist understood.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me, and know my thoughts.”

I want to close by saying this: I do not believe God causes tragedies in our lives in order to test us. I don’t believe God causes punishment or pain for that purpose. But I do believe we are tested when tragedy comes, because we are not puppets. God did not make us puppets. Tragedies happen. They happen to all of us.

As I shared in the E-News—though I know not everyone receives it, and we have many guests with us today—I want to say a word about the hymn we’re about to sing, “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.”

Many of you know the story, but some may not.

Thomas Dorsey had been writing jazz music and had become well known across the country, especially in the Midwest and parts of the South. He tells the story in his own words. He said, “It was back in 1932 when I was 32.”

He and his wife were living on the south side of Chicago. She was eight months pregnant when he was invited to St. Louis to sing at a large revival meeting. He didn’t want to go because of her pregnancy, but he knew people were waiting for him.

After he finished singing, the audience kept asking for one more song. Finally, he sat down, and a young boy rushed up with a telegram. (Some of you remember telegrams.) He tore it open. On that yellow page were the words that his wife had died that very afternoon. He returned to Chicago. His grief was mixed with hope because a baby boy had been born. But the child also died, and he buried his wife and son together in the same casket.

The grief overwhelmed him. He felt like he didn’t want to sing gospel music anymore. He wanted to return to jazz. He felt that God had left him. But friends came alongside him, especially Professor Frye, who seemed to understand exactly what he needed.

Dorsey wrote:

“On the following Saturday evening... he took me to Malone’s Poro College, a neighborhood music school on the South Side. It was quiet. The late evening sun crept through the curtained windows. I sat down at the piano, and my hands began to browse over the keys.”

And from that experience came one of the great hymns of the church.

So let us now sing, “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.”

Amen