

- 1) *Time* magazine conducted a survey several years ago on religious convictions. The vast majority of those surveyed said that they believed in Hell. Almost no one interviewed thought *they* would end up there; but almost everyone said they knew somebody who certainly *would*.
- 2) The distinction between “Good Guys/Bad Guys” is a much used means of making sense of the world
 - We guffaw at Hero/Villain, Lone Ranger/Outlaw—but *Mystery!* always has detective/murderer.
 - You can’t run a political campaign without attack ads;
and “Good Guy—Bad Guy is the basic narrative of ever single one.
 - Discussions on immigration policy always turn on “Law Abiding Citizens” *versus* “Illegal Aliens.”
 - Where would protracted religious disagreements be without “True Believers/Heretics”?
 - Wars would make no sense unless the Force of Good were locked in combat with the Force of EvilWe don’t always operate in these terms, but they are default settings.
Or, to speak more personally, they are assumptions I often catch myself making
- 3) But let’s not beat up on ourselves (or on the bad guys who see the world in terms of Good Guy/Bad Guy)
 - Binary logic--Either/Or distinctions are essential to reason & choice. We can’t live without them. (“2 kinds of people--those who see world in terms of either/or, and those who don’t.”)
 - Either/Or, Yes/No, Right/Wrong, Good/Bad—these are useful distinctions;
but they tend kick into overdrive when we are set faced with a crisis—
“a sudden attack of pain, distress, or disordered function”
 - *Who did this to us? How do we stop it? We gotta FIX this! We’ll fix THEM!*
9/11, Bank Failures, Oil Cost, Market Meltdown, Privacy Invasion, Executive Privilege—crises all.
“The Good Guys are under attack here—we have to DO something about the Bad.”
- 4) As Matthew tells the story, things are fast approaching a crisis point for Jesus.
 - Jesus has been teaching/healing/casting out demons—for anybody in need.
but many of those needy are regarded by the establishment as the “Bad Guys”
That makes Jesus a Bad Guy, they demonize him--literally
“He casts out demons by chief demon” say the self-described. Good Guys
A Bad Guy blowing off Bad Guys? That makes no sense!
(Just goes to show you that binary logic can land you in the lap of absurdity.)
 - But Jesus has a more important objective—mentoring a bunch of nervous interns.
This brewing religious/political crisis is understandably distracting their focus
 (“The Bad Guys are fingering *us* as Bad Guys—they are wrong, but we are scared.”)
 - So Jesus sits them down and says “We gotta talk about the Commonwealth of Heaven”
But instead of giving them a lecture, he sets off a fireworks display {Summarize Matthew 13}
 - Today’s parabolic firework puts the GG/BG factor front and center {Summarize Wheat/Weeds}
The servants fixate on the weeds, oblivious to the fact that wheat is growing just fine--
Clever enemy! All he does drop weed seeds and steal away, confident that the Good
Guys will trash the whole garden. (Does that make THEM Bad Guys?)
But the field owner blows the whistle on all this bizarre Alice-in-Wonderland logic—
Logic that would lead to consequences as devastating as they would be tragic:
Enough of this deadly game of Good Guy, Bad Guy, Tag, You’re It! he says
Let it be! Give it a rest! In Matthew’s Greek: *SUFFER IT FORGIVE IT!*
- 5) And what do Jesus’ disciples do with this teaching tool Jesus tries?
They show how hard wired they are in Good Guy/Bad Guy default mode.
Faced with one firework after another about how the Commonwealth of Heaven will not be deflected,
deterred, or even detained, by any distraction whatsoever all the disciples can manage to ask is:
Will you please explain to us this story about the WEEDS?
Fascinating! They are in exactly the same position as the servants in the story Jesus tells!

- 6) Clearly things are not going well in this classroom session on the Commonwealth of Heaven, so I see Jesus sighing to himself: “I draw them pictures and they don’t get it!”
 I fancy Jesus restraining fingers that are itching for some serious disciple weeding.
 I envision him drawing a deep breath and saying “*HOKEY--If you are so obsessed with how this will turn out, I can tell you for sure— the Good Guys win. All that language you know so well and use so often-- words and phrases about reaping wheat and burning weeds, weeping and gnashing of teeth— if hearing that helps you focus on the task at hand, namely--- sowing seeds, finding treasures, seeking pearls, sorting through new and old to separate what is healthy from what is diseased— if it will help you get on with that---well, yes, in the end, the Good Guys win NO-- the God of all Goodness will, in good time, somehow set things right. But listen here, Peter, Andrew, James, and John—that is God’s business, it is not yours. And in the mean time, you and I have work to do, and it’s NOT uprooting weeds.*”
- 7) Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is countering one kind of crisis by creating another.
 Crisis Definition 1—“A sudden attack of pain or disordered function”—FIX IT.
 Crisis Definition 2—“A decisively important turning point”—FACE IT
 9/11 was a crisis of both kinds--might our focus on *fixing* it have distracted us from *facing* it?
 The disciples ask Jesus, anxiously: *There are weeds out there--can’t you do something to fix it?*
 Jesus replies, quietly, firmly: *There is wheat out there--can we face up to the task of tending it?*
- 8) If anybody fits the definition of Bad Guy, Jacob does {Summarize—tumble weed in wilderness}
 God does not “fix” him for good; and God does not fix anything for him.
 God meets Jacob face to face in the middle of a crisis--and forces Jacob to begin facing a choice between who he *is* and who he *could be*.
 Stay tuned—this story is a long way from over.
- 9) In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that willingness to suffer with Jesus is a clear and sure sign of our willingness to let God adopt us-- as children of a loving parent, as siblings of God’s faithful Son, as citizens of the Commonwealth of Heaven.
 That suffering, however, is not a teeth gritting:
This is really gonna hurt—but we’ll get those Bad Guys, or die trying!
 Sharing in Divine Suffering entails something much more difficult—
 adopting God’s game plan for the Gardening Grace—
 and groaning alongside God in eager longing for the fruits of a Harvest of Good.
 How, exactly, are we supposed to do that?
 Let Matthew’s Jesus answer that question for himself: *Let anyone with ears—LISTEN.*