

Meditation: Lessons from the Weeds

Matthew 13: 24-30

Gospel Lesson from the Inclusive Language Bible.

Jesus presented another parable to those gathered: “The kingdom of heaven is like a farmer who sowed good seed in a field. While everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then made off. When the crop began to mature and yield grain, the weeds became evident as well.

The farmer’s workers came and asked, ‘Did you not sow good seed in your field? Where are the weeds coming from?’

The farmer replied, ‘I see an enemy’s hand in this.’ “They in turn asked, ‘Do you want us to go out and pull them up?’

“No,’ replied the farmer, ‘if you pull up the weeds, you might take the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest, then at harvest time I will order the harvesters first to collect the weeds and bundle them up to burn, then to gather the wheat into my barn.’”

The Word of the Lord.

As we heard last Sunday in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus, as wisdom teacher, uses parable, or wisdom story, aiming to break open our understanding of the meaning of the vision of the kingdom of heaven for his listeners.

“If you have ears to hear,” Jesus invites again and again. The idea that God’s unfolding reign of authority planted both within us, and before us, is meant to continually awaken us. It is meant to awaken *all* creation

to the realization that WE are all integral, and our participation in this unfolding vision through us is God's desire through us.

So I invite you to come along on a walk-about this morning to three differing vantage points of this bejeweled parable of the wheat and the weeds. This wisdom story just might stir up our curiosity and perhaps reveal confusion about things we thought we knew. Because parables don't allow easy interpretation, we would be wise to set aside early inclinations about its meaning and usefulness. I would also encourage you to listen with a soft focus, allowing yourself to be carried afield a bit, to see what turns up in your awareness.

The 1st vantage point, we'll wander around the question of the virtue of weeds. What, if anything, instructive is there in watching how things exist and grow around us in the natural world, that would be instructive to the quality of our participation in realizing God's reign here on earth, I wonder?!

I recently visited a small farm on Whidbey Island. As usual, Farmer Beth, offered a warm welcome and asked if I'd like to go see the garden. "Well, of course," I replied.

As we walked and talked through the rows, she proudly pointing out the fruits of their labors, I saw rows of carrots, onions, beets, strawberries, peppers, lettuces, cabbage, snap peas, and of course, a variety of weeds.

Now, we have got to hand it to the weeds for a moment. Inarguably, they know something about perseverance, and growing in unlikely, amazing corners and crannies and bleak conditions, even when unwelcomed. They present themselves shamelessly with built-in resilience that, in fact, is enviable. While they may disturb the order of the appearance of things, which is also a part of their mission in life,

they are for the most part, benign, except when they're not. They are hard-wired for resistance, a survival impulse. We feel it when we try to upend those dandelions with their roots that say, "I deserve to be here. I belong right here." And, as any farmer/garden-grower knows, they grow back!

The only difference between a flower and a weed is judgment," a friend recently shared. It's a matter of perspective, right? AND a desire, I think, to be open to a new way of seeing. Rather than assigning all weeds as bad, only created by the creator to irritate our sensibilities about what a tidy garden or field should look like, we might step back and wonder what if anything they actually have of value to contribute to our world – life, and perspective.

The virtue of weeds?!

From the 2nd vantage point, we'll ponder on the reflexive, almost primal urge many of us experience to pull up weeds when we see 'em. This sensation, this urge to 'pull up,' or 'pull away,' or to adjust something from how it's presented in front of us, our Buddhists friends name as aversion. It's that felt experience of being discontent with how things are. When we are not able to be okay with how things are in any given moment, we automatically separate ourselves from 'it,' often feeling distress, and this is painful. *"A garden of flowers and weeds? No!"*

We hear this urge to 'pull up,' in the voice of the farmer's workers in the parable when they discover the weeds in the field, and turning to the farmer, asks, *"Do you want us to pull the weeds?"* And the farmer says no. They assumed separating things out at the moment to be the best solution to the mess. To feel the inclination to pull up the weeds, and then to be told not to, well how frustrating!!

When something out of the ordinary arises, we often instinctively, without even thinking about it, retract, adjust, to try to make things okay again...and soon. We as humans have a deeply ingrained desire for things to remain the same, for things to feel okay, to be in order, in their place, constantly. It's a war with discontent, but what can also happen in a matter of seconds is the thought-laced trail that sounds something like:

What do you mean leave the weeds?

That can't be right.

You're not supposed to leave weeds in the field.

What about the crop?

It'll be ruined.

What a mess.

What's up with this farmer?

She's lost her mind...

This pattern of reactivity entangles us such that we forget what the original issue was in the first place. It makes its own confusion.

The farm workers, when faced with the farmer's guidance to leave the weeds, are in effect, confronted with the real possibility of failure, and the very real consequences of that outcome.

Such is the nature of life and how things are in the kingdom of heaven, the nature of reaching forward and then back, rising and falling, seeding, bearing fruit, dying, returning. The nature of God's authority moving within and through us, beckons those of us set on justice making, to stay the course, and sometimes that course calls for pulling up weeds, and sometimes not.

The 3rd and last vantage point we'll consider this morning is a more difficult one, that being to acknowledge the presence of an enemy in the kingdom. Remember the farmer's words?

"I see an enemy's hand here," Jesus tells. Mischief has been sown.

Now, mischief is like that, often coming under the cloak of night, coming when we're asleep, unaware, not on guard. You might know that feeling when on some morning you discover some kind of mischief in your yard, or neighborhood, or in the headlines of your newspaper that reads, "In the late hours of the night, the budget committee..., blah, blah, blah," or that sad, sinking feeling of dread that awakens with you at first light, having taken root within your spirit. Mischief, doubt, confusion, anxiety.

Are we supposed to stay awake and on the look-out all the time to catch mischief? Are you feeling like we've passed the times of the past when you can just simply trust that your belongings – your fields and gardens, will be respected, even looked after by others?

The farmer's reply to the workers to leave the weeds planted was a bit startling. Essentially, he says, leave the evidence of the enemy right where it is.

Let it be.

Let the weeds grow there.

We don't want to disturb the roots of the wheat growing alongside it.

This measured, waiting way of the farmer, reveals a recognition that scaling the response of an obvious 'clean up' effort could in fact do more harm, than to just leave it. This was not likely going to be a 100 fold return, like we heard about last week.

So what of the enemy in this story? With the acknowledgment of the presence of the enemy, we are challenged to own something else here, something that perhaps most of us would like to deny or be asleep to, and that is the presence of evil in the kingdom. It is disquieting to look at.

The farmer calls the hand of the enemy, taking away the cloak of hidden-ness. While in the face of the mischief sown, the farmer guides the worker's in a measured, somewhat perplexing, response. Let the weeds be, and when all has come to full harvest, the weeds will be gathered and burned, and then the wheat will be gathered. For what purpose are the weeds burned? you might wonder. As in all parables, obscurity resides. Here I see a purifying immolation, a response to the voice of God. Evil is transformed, our nature is redeemed.

Who are we to be in the face of expressions of evil and the inherent confusion sown in our times? Having good yells and letting the curses rip without harming others close by can surely feel satisfying in the short term. But *who are we to be*, and *whose* are we to be in these days?! What are good practices for honestly addressing evil's presence, as we keep watch in the kingdom, our vision trained on the horizon within and before us? I'll name a few:

- *Name the evil; Take care with yourself in the presence of people who are overly self-possessed*
- *Notice your aversion/pulling away patterns; you may have room to build your muscles for tolerating, digesting what causes displeasure*
- *Practice imagining your enemy in their wholeness; After all, Jesus says in as many ways as he knows how throughout the gospels, "love your enemy, love your enemy, love your enemy"*

- *As Pastor Tim shared last week, continue to cast your seeds of light, goodness, mercy, love, patience, ANYWAY, because it is the nature of our Loving God to do so.*

Well, how can we sum this up, this parable, seemingly straightforward, yet profoundly difficult?

The kingdom of heaven as we experience both *within* us and *before* us in the world, includes *all* of life, benevolence and goodwill as well all the gestures of confusion seeded through acts of greed, neglect, hatred. God in Christ sows seeds of wisdom through the parables about being in relationship with the nature of how things are, about our living in the face of a 'mess,' and its various stripes of confusion sown by people who wish ill will.

Trying to separate ourselves from all ill will only find us in isolation. The weeds and the wheat grow together. If we are honest about the condition of our own heart fields, there's a mix in there too, a mix of love, generosity, hope, faith, patience, AND yes, the ways confusion shows up through jealousy, envy, and other acts of unskillfulness. It's all in there together, like the field of wheat and weeds.

Such is the nature of life and how things are in the kingdom of heaven, the nature of reaching forward and then back, rising and falling, sowing the new seed, bearing fruit, dying, returning. Sometimes the course, calls for 'pulling up weeds,' and sometimes not.

Confusion in its various expressions and feeling states will remain as part of our experience for now, and *when* it arises, it is helpful to name it as such as soon as we can. This allows us to regain our bearings and to re-locate the kingdom horizon we're aiming for.

We belong to God, even when we struggle and become entangled in confusion. But fear not. Remember when the horizon is obscured, the Wisdom of Solomon offers, *“Even with all of [God’s] great power, [God] judges us with mercy and guide us with great kindness, for [God] exercises strength as [God] chooses. By acting in this way, [God] teaches and shows his people, that those who are just must also be kind.”* (Wisdom of Solomon 12:18)

“Those who are just must also be kind.” Such is the nature of living in the kingdom for now.

In closing, Peter London so beautifully captures the nature of this journey, *“We too rise up, we ascend, we fall, only to rise and fall over and over, until we are leveled and become one again with the single mantle that is the resting ground and birthing ground of it all.”* (Peter London, *Drawing Closer to Nature*)

And so it is for now, the lessons from the weeds.

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