

“Weeding out Faith ”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

24 He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; **25** but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. **26** So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. **27** And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ **28** He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ **29** But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. **30** Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” **37** He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; **38** the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, **39** and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. **40** Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. **41** The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, **42** and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears[a] listen!

Two weeks ago we heard Matthew's version of the parable of the sower. In that account, seeds of the kingdom are generously sown every which way. The quality of their growth is left to the soil in which they are sown. Today we exposed to another seedy parable, or better stated, a parables involving seeds. But this time, a new element is introduced. Near the beginning of the passage that _____ and I read, in verse 25, we hear about a new possibility—a possibility for bad seeds that grow into weeds. Two weeks ago, we considered the soil. Today, the passage is more interested in the seeds. Read literally, the seeds can be interpreted as people. Do we want to be good seeds that grow and flourish? Alternatively posed, is the concern that we could be seeds that do not grow into life giving wheat, but we could rather become weeds. But a better way to understand just may be to recognize that that our individual journeys of faith and as a community of faith, in order for us grow into a healthy plant, we have do do things that will help cultivate us in a life-giving manner. However, this will not always be easy, as we just might encounter weeds among us, or within us, no matter the quality of the soil.

Let us pray: We pray O Lord, that your word would be a source of greater clarity. Silence the cacophony of voices that vie for our attention, and helps us settle out hearts on your voice of wisdom. And now, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Upon reading this weeks passage, I was reminded of a true story about my brother David. Several years ago, while living in the Baltimore are, David decided to open a sandwich shop. Recounting the experience, he mentioned all of the effort that went into the preparation for opening day. Negotiating the rent, applying for permits, buying equipment and food, and at the beginning, he was working on his own, no employees to help—so all depended on him. You could say he had a dream, we might call a seed, and planted it and invested in it for something worthwhile to grow. Well, the early June day arrived that was the grand opening. He had a sign up, finished the prep the night before, and drove up to the shop at 5:30 am in the morning, to get ready for a strong breakfast crowd.

As he arrived, Dave entered, and while turning everything on, it came to his attention that the grill wasn't working. He turned it on an off, and nothing. He scratched his head. His next instinct was to check the propane tank outside. Sure enough, when he looked outside, he was stunned to see that someone cut the gas line the night before. (He would later find out that while he was asleep that night before the grad opening, the last tenant of the building, who happened to be disgruntled with the owner, took it upon himself to show his displeasure by cutting the gas line with a saw.) Upon the discovery, David said that for a moment, he felt like giving up. He had worked for months, and at the last minute, something completely out of his control, sabotaged the moment.

At some point or points in time, how many of us, if not all of us, have had a similar feeling? We all can identify with doing what we can to help something grow from a good seed into a good plant: be work, relationships, communities or other arenas. And then something challenges our work. We may even feel good about ourselves about what we are trying to do or trying to accomplish. And some thing or some things get in the way. We try hard to be loving to a family or friend only to find ourselves rebuffed. We engage our work ethically and

thoughtfully in our workplace and someone or something undercuts all that we do. We try to make good decisions in our lives about how to conduct ourselves and how to invest our time, and someone in our midst discourages us or even seeks to sabotage our process. In such situations, we just might find our faith tested. We may question: what is the point of trying to do good in the first place, if the weeds are simply going to choke our efforts? It can lead to a sense of defeat. And to be sure, when we hold up the mirror, there are times that the culprit can be us. When we are not careful, we might be the person who does the letting down—we can be the weed.

In the words of the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*,

“The Parable of the Weeds has many facets, but we can surely see, simmering behind it, the experience of Matthew's church—and ours too. It chronically comes as a shock to find that the world, that the family into which we were born, that even the church is not an entirely trustworthy place. The world has places of wonder, but alleys of cruelty, too. Families cause deep pain as well as great joy. The church can be inspiringly courageous one moment and petty and faithless the next. Good mixes in with the bad. ‘Where did these weeds come from?’ is a perennial human cry?”...[The commentator goes on to ask, “Are we lost then forever, then, in a hopelessly compromised world?”]

In our passage, Jesus recognizes the problem. He is aware that there will be seeds, be it people, or be it social realities, that will grow up into wheat of the kingdom of God and bear grain. And he knows that in the middle of the night, the seeds of weeds will also find themselves planted in the soil of the world. And they will grow up. And they will dot the landscape, serving as an eyesore to the wheat field. But even more, they will have roots that will choke and crowd out healthy growth. It may just be a metaphor to illustrate good vs. evil, love, vs. hate, justice vs. injustice, life vs. death—the human conundrum.

And after laying out the idea of the conundrum, Jesus anticipates the question that his faithful follower may pose in a time of feeling defeated: Is it worth it Jesus to grow into wheat? Is it worth it Jesus, to dedicate our selves to good, and love and justice, and life, when the weeds of hate evil, and hate, and injustice, and death are going to rear their ugly heads at every turn—sometimes around us, and even sometimes within us? Should we try? Or should we just morph into weeds and milk the system of life only for our own benefit?

“Master, did you not sow good seeds in the field?...Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?” Should we pull them out of the ground? Try to eliminate them all?

“No,” responds Jesus, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.” So should we just let weeds take us over? “Let both wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest.” The weeds will be burned by the harvester. But your job now is to grow the wheat...in spite of the weeds.

Friday and Saturday, your session and some of the deacons gathered at the Norbertine Community Center in the South Valley for a visioning retreat. Saturday morning, we worshipped with the abbot and the brothers from the Norbertine order. During our worship, we sang from Psalm 92 which provides us pertinent reminders: though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever, but you, O Lord, are on high forever.” And a few verses down, “The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in

Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap, showing that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”

I am also reminded of the wisdom from Psalm 1: Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.”

Shall we give up on good, on love, on justice, or on life, because their polar opposites exist to do harm? No. No brothers and sisters! The implementation of God’s kingdom is not an overnight endeavor. Bad seeds can be planted overnight, but for good to be cultivated—that’s hard work. Jesus tells us not to pull all the weeds, but he does not say, stand idle in the face of evil. Part of cultivating good is the hard work of cultivation. That is what we are called to do. Keep sowing good, keep loving sacrificially, keep promoting justice, keep investing heart and soul to the flourishing of life! Sometimes now, and always in the end, that way of faithfulness will always outweigh choosing the way of the weeds.

The morning of the grand opening, my brother felt defeated. That is until word spread quickly in the community what had happened. Nearby neighbors rushed over to bring him portable grills to cook the breakfast meats. It ended up being a very successful opening day as he sold more sandwiches than expected.

When we stay committed to our faith, even in the face of weeds, we will move past the dark, defeating moments. Good things will happen. Not only in the end, but on the way. When we commit to good, love, justice, and life, the weeds that may crop up within us wither away. We join with others and are buoyed by their support. And there will be moments of victory that remind us why we didn’t give up in the first place.

The following admonitions are from Dr. Kent Keith in a book he wrote about leadership. He calls them the “paradoxical commandments.” They are often erroneously attributed to Mother Theresa, however, she did keep a copy of the ones posed in the children’s home she worked in in Calcutta. I close with the paradoxical commandments:

“People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.
Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.
What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.
If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.
Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.
In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.