

## The Weeds and the Wheat

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time - July 19, 2020

One has to be careful in interpreting this gospel. It is easy to say that the good seed are the children of God's kingdom and the weeds are the children of the evil one. However, the line we cannot cross is that of predestination. I have always been taught and believed that God desires all people to be with him for all eternity. To say that some people are born evil, and it is impossible for them to undergo conversion, is something I simply cannot accept. I once had a discussion with a Presbyterian, whose core belief was that we are all predestined. Meaning those who are born to go to heaven—go to heaven, and those that are born to go to hell—go to hell. If there is any sort of conversion that takes place within someone, it is because they were destined to go to heaven in the first place.

I remember thinking, what is the purpose of life. Why doesn't God just bypass life and have people go to heaven and hell. I have always professed the greatest gift that God has given us is the gift of life, and the second greatest gift he has given to us is the gift of free will. To completely disregard the gift of free will, in my opinion, is an affront to our humanity, and the way that God created us.

Whenever we look at any of the parables, we can only push them so far. Take for instance the farming practices that Jesus is suggesting. One of the plagues of every farmer, and anyone who has tried to grow a garden, is weeds. They compete for sunlight, moisture and nutrients in the soil. Every farmer and gardener since the beginning of time, has tried to pull all the weeds in the field. Yet Jesus is saying that we should leave the weeds until harvest. Now I know that Jesus is divine, and has insights that I do not have, so perhaps there is something about this parable that is not disputing farming practices, or denigrating our free will.

To determine that some plants are totally evil and some plants are totally good...takes divine wisdom. Every time human beings have made a judgement about who is good and who is evil, has ended in disaster. History is full of leaders...dictators...Pharisees...who have labeled a group of people as sub-human, which has given the rest of the population an excuse to hate them, prejudge them and attempt to exterminate them. Whenever hatred enters into the picture you can be assured that those behind the hatred, although they may profess to be doing God's work—are not. There is not one case of Jesus expressing hatred toward another...anger and frustration perhaps--but never hatred. I would go so far as to say that anyone who expresses hatred, is no longer doing the will of God. It is interesting to note that the reapers are angels, messengers from God, who are instilled with divine wisdom. Only with divine wisdom can we determine who is evil and who is not. Perhaps this is not a parable about judgement, but rather a parable about patience and mercy.

Perhaps we need to really understand what a weed is. I checked out a couple of online dictionaries. A weed can be defined as: 1) a plant that is not valued where it is growing and is usually of vigorous growth, especially if it chokes out more desirable plants. 2) a valueless plant growing wild, especially one that grows on cultivated ground to the exclusion or injury of the desired crop. Or simply 3) a wild plant growing where it is not wanted. I have been around enough farmers to know that a canola plant growing in a wheat field is considered a weed. And conversely, a wheat plant growing in a canola field is considered a weed. I also know that in mom's garden, there were always dill plants that sprung up like weeds, but mom always told us to leave them alone...when we were weeding the garden.

Perhaps instead of being so intent on labeling someone a weed, we need to think about what weeds do to a plant that is growing in the place where it should. We can look at this in two ways: 1) What good the weeds do by themselves. 2) What benefits the weeds offer to the good plants that are growing. I don't think that many people would argue that dandelions are the most prevalent weed in Saskatchewan. But at the same time dandelions are good for: Salad, especially in the spring. They produce an abundance of pollen, which bees love, which in turn give us honey. Dandelions have proven to contain beta-carotene which helps reduce cell damage. They help reduce cholesterol. Not to mention their root makes excellent tea.

Now think of the people who are weeds in your life. How have they helped you: When I think of the people who have been a thorn in my side, I think about, how, over the long haul, they have made me a stronger person. They have forced me to see things from different angles. They have created an environment in which I must be more proficient in stating my opinion. In short, they have made me a better person. We cannot forget the parable of the mustard seed. It takes time for the small seed to grow into a tree. It takes time for bread to grow. Sometimes it takes time to determine what is a wheat, and what is a weed. We must take care not to remove the weed too soon, or we may damage the wheat.

When St Paul was praying to God, he asked, not once but three times to remove the thorn from his side, but God's response was "My grace is sufficient." I think when we have thorns in our side, it forces us to focus on Christ. Rather than praying that God remove all the weeds in our lives, we must realize that the weeds and wheat are so intertwined, that they are an inseparable unit. We are called to turn every bad situation into goodness. We are called to turn our hurts and pains into goodness. Now I am not saying that is easy. That is why we need to return to the Eucharist week after week, so we can receive the strength we need to forge ahead. Wheat grows on earth when we successfully embody our deeper realization to love. Weeds grow in earth when we fail to embody those realizations.

All this demonstrates the depth of God's forgiveness and willingness to have us at his side, for all eternity. But make no mistake about it. God will not be mocked forever. In time good will be rewarded, and evil punished when Christ comes again in all his glory and all will be made right. Until then, the Good will coexist with the Bad. And only God can determine what is truly evil.