

Proper 11 Yr. A: Take it Easy on the Weeds

Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, July 19, 2020

Back in Minnesota I used to plant flowers in planters and hanging pots every spring. It's a ritual in cold climates. A few glorious months of flowers and plants blooming in the yard.

I used to enjoy letting some weeds grow as well. Not a lot. Just some. I wanted to see what would happen. The plants we judge as annoying weeds never get to blossom. I'll tell you some interesting and beautiful wild creatures emerged. Maybe not all of those weeds were dangerous or ugly.

Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins after visiting the country side of Inversnaid, Scotland, wrote in defense of weeds,

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet,
Long live the weeds and the wildness yet.*

We Christians carry the shame of our ancestors who were obsessed with religious weeding. Too often religious people take it upon themselves to do the weeding meant for God. Some of the greatest crimes against humanity have been perpetrated by Mother Church: burnings, drowning, murder, slander, and condemnation. In our efforts to free the universe of infidels we have also killed countless innocents.

Identifying weeds on God's behalf continues in the Church. We are just more subtle and disingenuous about it.

In the parable today Jesus tells us to leave the weeds alone. He isn't saying that there aren't any weeds. There surely are weeds sprouting up in the Church and the world. The evil one is always sowing weeds, especially in the Church. It is the devil's way of keeping the Church from doing her mission to reconcile all people to each other and to God through Jesus Christ.

The weeds of pride, resentment, jealousy, gossip, and false judgments are growing everywhere. But Jesus says leave it alone. God is sending his reapers, the angels, to sort it all out.

We disciples can identify the weeds, name them and address them but we must do it with humility and wisdom. We have to be careful. What we think might be a weed might turn into a flower. And all the weeds among us have the potential to turn around and become good plants bearing fruit.

In so many ways, we humans have no business judging others. This doesn't mean that we can't make judgments at all. It isn't about ignoring the weeds. It is about turning to God for direction in our discernment.

There is another way to interpret this parable. One that can be beneficial to the health of the Church, our families and our communities. Imagine that the field isn't the world or the Church but your own soul.

We participate in the life of the Church and try to live in right relationship with God and each other. By Word and Sacrament, we plant beautiful flowers in our souls. But the weeds keep sprouting up.

The evil one is spreading seeds inside of us just as he does in our neighbors. It is easy to identify the weeds in others. It is difficult to

acknowledge the weeds growing inside of us.

In our Baptismal Covenant, we are called to regularly separate the weeds from the wheat in our souls.

Jesus is here to help. Ask him what to do with all of those weeds. Ask him to show you the distinctions among what you want, what you need and what you are holding onto so tightly that it is choking everything around you.

We harvest our souls every time we make our confession either privately or communally.

It is an ancient custom in the Church to do a self-examination at the end of the day. You sit quietly and review your day. What did I enjoy? What was I angry about? Did I hurt anyone today? What did I see as bad and good and why did I see it that way? Then you make your confession and pray for forgiveness and the strength to start over with what you have learned.

In our Christian discipleship we have to judge between good and evil. We cannot escape that responsibility. But the judging has got to start within ourselves. In examining ourselves we learn how to more compassionately engage with the faults of others. We can more easily forgive those who trespass against us when we are more often asking God to forgive us our trespasses.

It is self-examination that opens the door to our mission of reconciliation. When we know our own weeds, we can learn how to take it a little easier on all of those other weeds around us.