



Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, June 2020

What is a Weed?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp11_RCL.html

Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

God of abundant grace, we ask that you speak to us today through these scriptures. Give us ears to hear and the ability to recognize your voice, so that our hearts may listen to the cares of the world. May we respond as Jesus would have us do. Amen.

Self-disclosure: growing up I spent time on the family farm in west Texas – a week or so at Christmas, a week or so for spring break, and three scorching months of summer -- enough time to learn a few things about farming from Granddaddy and my Uncle Glenn. In the 2000 or so years since this Gospel story, agricultural practices have changed (at least in this country), but the basic scenario remains the same – prepare the field, plant the seeds, fertilize, pray for rain (but not too much rain), pray for sunshine (but not too much sunshine), and in between, control the weeds, until at last comes the harvest. Then let some fields rest; plan crop rotation. Repeat...

Last week we learned about the sower who scattered seeds on the path and the birds ate them, on the rocks where they sprouted but couldn't take root, among the thorns where they sprouted and took root but were overwhelmed by the weeds, and in the good soil where the seeds germinated, rooted, grew, and produced a bountiful return. In this week's Gospel, the householder bought wheat seed that didn't have any weed seed in it. He had the good seed planted in his well-prepared field. But the "enemy" – the ancient bioterrorist -- sowed weed seeds in the wheat field.

In the verses excluded from today's Gospel are two more parables both beginning, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." The kingdom of heaven is like the tiny mustard seed that grows into the greatest of shrubs and becomes a nesting place for birds of the air. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast mixed with flour until all of it was leavened." Jesus spoke in parables to "proclaim what is hidden from the world." And he said, "Let anyone with ears listen!"

Another disclosure – my love of literature and poetry, combined with many years in Education for Ministry (EfM) make me appreciate the value of allegory, metaphor and simile. What I most appreciate about these literary devices is that each of us is allowed to consider and discern for ourselves what the reference could mean. So I don't appreciate it when Jesus explains the parable to his disciples, even though they asked. I think he could have been more Socratic. "What do YOU think it means?"

One Pastor in my Tuesday study group looked up the Greek word translated here 'weeds' and it was not 'weeds' but 'wild rice' – a valuable cash crop in the Great Lakes region where he lives.

Another pointed out that dandelions, though called weeds, are the earliest spring food for bees; the leaves are healthy edible greens, and (she said) dandelion wine is delicious.

Our second spring living here, my son 'helped' me weed the flowerbeds and dug up all of the daylilies. Without their pretty flowers, he didn't recognize them. That same spring I went walking with a gardener friend. As we walked, I admired the flowers that were everywhere. That yellow one that looks almost like a snapdragon? She shook her head. "Dalmatian Toadflax, Glenda. It's an invasive noxious weed."



Look at the daisies! "Oxeye Daisies, Glenda. Noxious weed."

What about those clusters of dark lavender flowers on the hairy vines? "Vetch, Glenda. It's a noxious weed." She was wrong about that one. Vetch is an annual sprawling cover crop used for soil improvement, including nitrogen fixation and erosion control. People pay for vetch seeds!



The dictionary defines 'weed' as: a plant that is not valued where it is growing, especially one that tends to overgrow or choke out more desirable plants; also, an obnoxious growth, thing, or person.

The Scribes, Pharisees and Romans thought Jesus was a weed – and they tried to get rid of him. But like sedge grass, thistle, bindweed and milfoil; every rhizome, every tiny root left in the soil, every detached plant segment has the potential to become a new plant. The Jesus Movement was not killed when Jesus was crucified.

I wonder if you are bothered by Jesus' judgement in this gospel passage? "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." If it's any consolation, scholars who analyze phrases attributed to Jesus think this one is the

gospel author's expression of the tumultuous life experienced in that early Christian community and not something Jesus really said.

I don't believe God condemns us sinners to fiery hell. Sometimes I take myself there. But today's Psalm tells us no matter where we are, God is there, in the depths of despair, even in death, holding us fast with his right hand. "If there is any wicked way in me, lead me in the way everlasting." Maybe the "furnace of fire" is the creator's burning love where the dross will be removed. When love prevails, the "righteous will shine like the sun..."

"Breathe on me, breath of God, Blend all my soul with Thine,

Until this earthly part of me Glows with Thy fire divine." [Words: Edwin Hatch]

From the beginning, we have lived in a garden of good and evil; the crops entangled with the weeds. Paul's letter to the church in Rome exhorts those early Christians to live in the spirit; to be worthy of inheriting the Kingdom with Christ. Creation is "groaning" with suffering, as Rebekah groaned in labor with Esau and Jacob. But redemption is coming! Birth and new life will come. Hope for a better life that is now out of reach, is just around the corner. We wait, but we do not wait alone. Through the boundless grace of God, we have received the Holy Spirit! Jesus will be revealed in our hearts; Jesus the one who sets the good example, who sends his followers (you and me) to tell the good news and to live the good way.

The world is fertile ground and the good soil is the loving and generous nature and nurture of those who help us grow and mature. May God, help us be cultivators of good seed; help us to be better Children of God and better followers of Jesus.

Now and always, may the power of God surround us, the unconditional love of Jesus enfold us; and the fire of the Holy Spirit burn in our hearts and shine forth in our lives. In the name of God; almighty creator, pain bearer, life sustainer. Amen.