

Weeds in the Wheat

Genesis 28:10-19a & Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Rev. James Ramsey ~ June 20, 2014

Weeds...They can threaten your wheat crop, ruin your garden, choke your lawn. Weeds also make for a great metaphorical image – as Jesus shows in his parable.



We can spend way too much time worrying about weeds and not enough time growing healthy and strong ourselves. Good lawn care, along with effective gardening and certainly wheat farming has much in common with good Christian "life care."

Minneapolis pastor Leith Anderson tells of urgently calling ChemLawn to deal with his suburban weed-infested lawn, only to have them reject his lawn as a client



because it was, well, too weedy. One loyal member of his church volunteered to totally remove his old lawn and start a new one, an offer he was almost ready to accept when another member, an old farmer, gave him some wise advice: "Don't worry so much about getting rid of the weeds. Just grow the grass. Grow good, healthy grass and the grass will take care of the weeds."

The Andersons took his prescription, watering, fertilizing, aerating, doing all they could to cultivate good grass. After a couple of years, their lawn looked just as good as everyone else's.

The Andersons had to ask themselves what would be their primary focus - growing grass or killing weeds? Like the householder from Jesus' parable, the Andersons decided to concentrate on the positive - on growth - instead of pouring their time, energy and resources into killing off weeds.

Turns out Rev. Anderson's approach to his lawn is also a holy approach to life.

Maybe you can relate to Jesus' parable about weeds in the wheat. There used to be a bumper sticker..."Don't Let The Turkeys Get You Down."



It's easy to lose your personal concentration and get discouraged by the crass, cruel, under-achieving, negative, evil people around you. Have you ever been frustrated when your focused, committed effort was diluted by working alongside those who are indifferent, or motivated only by self-interest? There's another version of the saying – It's hard to soar with eagles when you're surrounded by turkeys. This is more than a joke. Since the beginning the church has struggled with naysayers and complainers, those working against the common good, disrupting, derailing, tearing down. Any crowd of people will be a potpourri of different motivations and some will inevitably be against all that is right and good and healthy – although they are not always so easy to distinguish.



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Today, Jesus addresses for us this mixture of the good and not-so-good in our experience. His parable about the weeds reminds us of the more memorable Parable of the Sower and the Seed, which Jesus tells right before it. The language and the imagery are the same. Only now, besides the The Sower, a new character has entered the picture – an enemy who sneaks in and intentionally sows weed seeds among the wheat.

We might hope for, or imagine, that this enemy is immediately confronted, exposed, punished – yet that's not how the story goes. The role of this “enemy” is not debated, nor is his presence contested. Rather, Jesus' story focuses on two responses to the effects of the enemy's work.



First: the workers become alarmed at the sight of the weeds sprouting among the wheat. They are edgy. They can't understand where in the world the weeds came from. They seem even to harbor doubts about the householder and whether the seed he sowed was really “good” seed. When the workers are told that an enemy is responsible for the weeds, they want to take matters into their own hands and pull up the weeds to maintain a pure crop. We can understand such a response.

Second, there is the householder, who doesn't seem surprised or agitated about the weeds, but urges the workers to be patient. It is not that the householder doesn't care about the weeds – in fact, he knows what needs to be done – that is, turn them over to the reapers at harvest time. The reapers can properly separate them from the wheat. Any premature “weeding” is bound to damage the wheat crop.

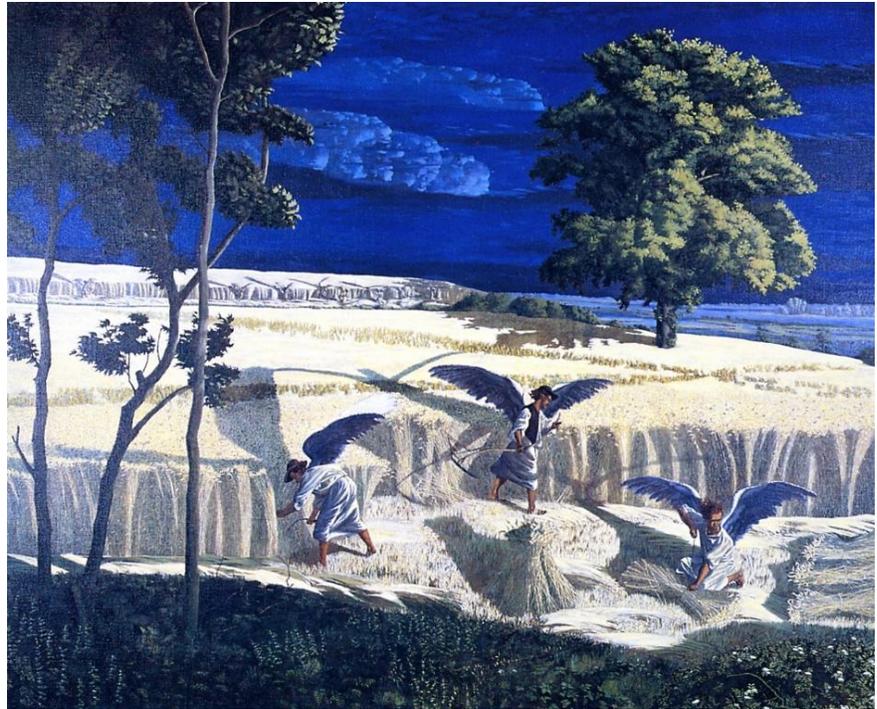
So, there is a double-edged impact to Jesus' story – even without the interpretation that follows. On the one hand, the nervousness that makes us want to root out the evil among us is exposed as foolhardy, if not arrogant...

On the other hand, the parable presents us with an image of the final judgment, which inevitably makes us uncomfortable. What one of us has not acted like a weed?

Some Christians believe themselves to be experts at spotting the weeds. They arrogantly assume they are pure wheat and they go about rooting out the weeds. Yet Jesus seems to suggest that stance is misguided, at best.

Jesus knows the weeds exist, we need not point them out, nor is it our responsibility to eradicate them. Jesus assures his disciples – the weeds will be taken care of.

The good news is that Jesus describes the field, which is the "world", as a field of wheat, not as a field of weeds. That's an important distinction. It's easy for us to look around and see the bad, focus on



the evil, despair because the world has gone wrong – but when Jesus sees the world, he looks out across not a field of weeds in which there is wheat growing, but a field of wheat in which there are weeds growing.

As hard as things are, as bad as they seem, as difficult as life may come across, as vulnerable as we might feel – Jesus meant to encourage disciples – to lift their spirits – to give them confidence. Jesus implies that there are more of the faithful, more of those on God's side, more who seek the good, than we sometimes realize.



Yes, there is evil. There are weeds in the field and they do damage to the crop, but they exist in a planted field of wheat. The good seeds have been sown and the Sower has not abandoned the field. Harvest-time will come and God will sort it out.

In the meantime...what can be done? Grow where you are planted. Bear good fruit for the Householder. By living and thriving, loving and abiding, we are indirectly, but effectively managing the weeds among us. It is sort of the theory behind groundcover.

For years I grew hostas and found myself weeding around them many times during the growing season – until I discovered Sweet Woodruff. This cultivated



indigenous woodland plant acts as a beautiful groundcover – perfectly blending with hostas and – and virtually eliminating weeds.

Like I learned about my hostas, and the Anderson's learned about their lawn, the wheat farmer knows, a very natural way of preventing weeds is to have such a strong and thick wheat crop, it will outgrow any weeds. Such a crop will cover the ground, leaving little space for weeds to grow. Wheat will also shade the ground, making it too cold for weeds. By shading the ground with thick and healthy wheat, the crop takes away the oxygen and sunlight the weeds need to grow strong.

Jesus invites us, calls us, commands us to go about our business being the Children of God.

Our job is to be wheat, not weeds. We're not called to be the farmer. God plays that role. Rooting up weeds is not part of our job description. It's going to be OK – even if you have weeds growing right in your backyard.



God has a wheat-management plan...



The weeds can't win!