

“The Garden of Heaven”

Weeds, weeds, weeds, they are everywhere this time of year. Flower beds, landscaping, vegetable gardens, even our sidewalks and driveways are infested with weeds. If you are a gardener you know that if the soil is good enough to grow something you like, it is also good enough, in fact better than good enough, to grow weeds. So weeding this time of year is a must.

For me pulling weeds is as ingrained as breathing. When I see a weed I find myself reaching down to pull it up before I even think about it. I come by this obsession honestly. You see I grew up in a family nursery business. From the age of fourteen on I worked every summer and most Saturdays at the nursery. My job was invariably pulling and hoeing weeds. I hated it. But as an adult when I see a weed I cannot seem to help myself. I want to pull it up. It is nearly Pavlovian. I think my dad would be pleased.

I know the importance of weeding, so when reading today’s gospel lesson, I wondered why the farmer does not want the workers to weed the field. Weeds steal precious nutrients from crops. They take water, minerals, fertilizer and crowd out other plants stealing sunlight, too. If you don’t pull up the weeds your crops will not be nearly as healthy or prolific. A smart farmer wants the weeds out of the way. What’s more the job of the farmer’s servants is to tend the crops. They are going to be idle if they are not pulling and hoeing weeds. It seems from a practical perspective that the farmer is making one bad decision after another in this parable.

But as is so often the case in Jesus’ parables he turns the practical world on its head in order to show us a different way. The first indication of this is whenever Jesus begins by saying, “The kingdom of heaven can be compared to...” That is a signal that Jesus is about to tell us something very different from the world we know. The kingdom of heaven defies what we think is reasonable, and sure enough this story is outside of human reason. A farmer confronted with a field that is sprouting wheat and weeds does not do the reasonable thing and have his workers pull up the weeds. Instead he lets them grow together fearing that some of the wheat will get pulled up too. But isn’t that one of the by-products of weeding? We pull up the weeds and some of the good stuff so that the rest of the good stuff will survive and flourish.

That is true in this life, but in God's kingdom another ethic is at work. In the kingdom of heaven, the wheat is too precious to lose by accidentally pulling it up. The wheat, that is you and me, which is sown by God, is too precious to pull up even one stalk by accident. Collateral damage which we find acceptable at so many times in our world is not acceptable in the world to come. So the weeds and the wheat are allowed to grow together until harvest time.

I believe there is more to this parable. In the kingdom of heaven, the Son of Man is also willing to let the weeds, sown by the enemy, grow up alongside the wheat, because there is a chance, a very marvelous chance, that the weeds might find themselves turned into wheat.

This is such good news. I would bet that everyone here has felt like a weed, acted like a weed, or been a weed at sometime or another. Even if we were sown as wheat, we have acted like weeds by denying love to others, withholding from others, or being mean or foolish. We have been one of a million things that would mark us as weeds that ought to be pulled up and thrown in the wheelbarrow for disposal. But Jesus is not going to give up on us so quickly. We have the potential to be the best wheat and to live into the full potential that God wants for us.

Julian of Norwich, a 14th and 15th century English mystic, in her book *Revelation of Divine Love* wrote: "The love of God Most High for our soul is so wonderful that it surpasses all knowledge. No created being can know the greatness, the sweetness, the tenderness of the love that our Maker has for us."

The God who created us, knows us, loves us and is not going to give up on us because we are a little weedy. The God who trusted in and worked with really weedy folks like Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Rahab, King David, Peter, and Paul is not giving up on you or me. God's harvest of love cannot be upended by the tricks of the enemy, or the weediness of our souls. God's love is so overwhelming that no matter how hard we try to resist; God's love will prevail.

Because God is God, and because when all is said and done God's love is irresistible, the harvest will be plentiful. And the weeds, well if everything else is turned on its head as it has been in this parable, then in the kingdom of heaven even the weeds will become precious wheat. And that my brothers and sisters is very, very good news indeed.