

When I was first contemplating Matthew's gospel, this parable seemed fairly straightforward. It's about whose good and whose bad. Seeds and weeds. As Jesus elaborates: the children of God are good seed. Everybody else are weeds, bad seed sown by the Devil.

But is it really, so clear cut? Don't we just want to make it so? It's easier then, isn't it? If it's us and them. Good seed does what's right and good. It's 'them' that causes all the problems. What if we could just make the weeds go away? You know... spray a little weed-be-gone and poof! Our problems would disappear!

But we know from history and this eternally revolving roundabout that drawing a dividing line just isn't effective, much like some of those pest sprays for the garden. Where do we lay down the weed block in our country? Democrats versus Republicans. Right versus left. Nationalists versus immigrants. Wealthy versus destitute. One color versus another. Humanity versus the Earth. And most recently, mask wearers versus mask flaunters.

But really isn't so clear cut... who is good seed, who is weed. Accusations and allegations abound among us mere mortals. But did you notice that although God points the finger to the destructive Spiritual forces at work in the global field, God didn't accuse 'everybody' asleep when this malevolent sowing of weeds transpired?

God seems less bent on blaming and more intent on growing. After all, who suffers in the bid to be right? To win at all costs? It's me, when I wear the long flowing robes of Judge; it's me when I claim that I am the Master Gardener, taking matters into my own hands, rooting out the weeds.

Truthfully, who among us doesn't want at times, to eradicate those darn, troublesome weeds? Last week, I mentioned having attended workshops with Master Gardener Elsa Bakalar in Western Mass. As a newby perennial gardener, this was essential instruction. At the conclusion of a session, she gave us some seeds from her gardens to scatter in ours, atop the deep white winter snows. About a 100 seeds each. Those gorgeous salmon-pink Icelandic Poppies would wind their way down into the soil and later spring up almost as if by magic!

Did I forget that I sprinkled those seeds around? Yes. Did I remember what those emerging plants looked like? No. Did I enthusiastically uproot all of those darlings? Mostly! Was I simultaneously heartsick and overjoyed to discover that I hadn't thoroughly succeeded in my efforts? Indeed!

Returning to Jesus' parable, the weed he's referencing is known as Bearded Darnel. It looks identical to wheat until it bears seed. But, it has no redeeming virtue whatsoever and is even life-threatening, causing everything from hallucinations to death. (FoTW Yr A, Vol. 3, p.260) Surely, weeds like this should be sought out and destroyed!

But if I look into deeper soil, supposedly good fertile soil... what do I find there but weeds within myself. Jesus notes, I can't dislodge the weeds intertwined among the good plants without damaging both. I learned that Icelandic poppies and dandelions look awfully similar before flowering! And now of course, I love the dandelions too. We have both good and bad seed within. Jesus tells us to "leave it alone."

Otherwise, we tear ourselves apart in the process of trying to rid ourselves of the weeds, the impurities. That's also true for the greater body of humanity, for we all grow in one great garden under God. When Jesus explained "the parable of the weeds of the field" He said quite simply, "the field is the world." (Mt. 13:38) And there is a saying that I learned while at seminary, "The universal always begins with the particular." That means that if there is good seed and weed in God's field, then the good seed and weed is within myself, my home, my church, my community, my country, my world.

If I try to eradicate the weeds of the world (which I can't) I eradicate myself in the process (which I will). That is exactly what the evil sower wishes to cultivate, weeds of hate and destruction. For each of us has a bit of weediness within. As St. Paul bluntly puts it, there is "no one without sin, no not one! All sin. All fall short." (Ro. 3:9-10)

He was drawing on Ecclesiastes from the Wisdom tradition. (7:20) Wisdom proves that weed and seed co-exist. It's just how the world is. But don't we want to know "Why?!!!" Why God!???? Why is there so much violence, corruption, and suffering? Why do bad things happen to good people? We try to make meaning of it, make sense, find answers.

Just as the slaves in the parable ask, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?" (Mt. 13:27) This is the question of theodicy- the attempt to understand and find answers to the question, "Why does a good God permit the manifestation of evil?" In other words, why does God allow weeds in the world? That isn't the question to ask; but rather, "What are we to do?"

The servants want to uproot the noxious weeds, but The Master says, "Wait." Leave the weeds to God. The 'kin-dom' of heaven is an unkempt garden, a wild field, full of good seed and weed. May we dare to discern the weeds of judgment and rivalry vying in our own hearts. May we water good seed throughout the fields of

the world with tears of compassion in God's spirit of reconciliation. May we 'stay' the hand that reaches to eradicate the weeds, long enough to allow God's hand to intervene. May we cultivate the good seed and leave the weeding to God.

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