

Sermon – 7th Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 and Romans 8:18-27
July 19, 2020
“The Problem with Weeds”

Today our Lord Jesus offers what we might call a lesson in “theological agronomy”, the thorny, or more precisely “weedy” problem of evil asserting place where we suppose it does not belong – it God’s good creation. By referencing the origin and ways of weeds, Jesus counsels his followers on what to do with those noxious folks in our midst – people who seem content to thumb their noses at God’s good intention for creation - real, not theoretical ones who, as theologian N.T. Wright has written, “*have given their lives and energies to inventing and developing wickedness, profiting from it, luring others into it, and wreaking large-scale human devastation as a result.*”

“*The parable of the wheat and the weeds*” as this story is called, is paired today with Romans 8:18-27 and that’s a good thing, because the parable our Lord tells in Matthew 13, despite his explanation of it, is tough to understand apart from the Apostle Paul’s contention that nothing happens in this world that “surprises” our Lord. We might ask, with bewilderment, even revulsion, “*where did the weeds come from*” and more urgently “*what can we do to stop their spread*” – all quite appropriate and understandable responses. The landowner in the story is not surprised that the very same conditions that make it possible for good people to be good allows evil to be evil. Yet as repugnant as evil can be, even it’s worst manifestations pale, Paul says, in comparison to what God has in store for the servants of the Servant King – Jesus.

“*I consider the present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed, for the creation was subjected to futility (frustration) not by its own choice but by the one who subjected it, in hope.*” Paul knew a thing or two about weeds – he watched it multiply 30,60, or 100 times in places he visited – it’s soil was the local culture, common human immorality, corrupt government, covetous, resentful merchants, offended leaders of other religions, all poked their weedy heads out where Paul preached. The gospel it seems, attracts attention, even its’ opposite. Paul knows that weeds do well, sometimes better, in the very conditions that give growth to goodness, charity, humility and kindness. He knows, as we do, that God has in his unsearchable if perplexing wisdom seen fit to allow both to emerge – to compete as it were for the soil.

But Paul knows, as our Lord most assuredly does, that there will be a reckoning one day, and that reckoning will be the “*revealing of the sons (children) of God.*” Sad to say, but Christians are not called to grow in clean fields – planted, watered, tended, trimmed, in nice plots of land like so many resplendent Brookfield, Elm Grove, Wauwatosa lawns under a summer sun - lush, undisturbed greenness. God knows, indeed has willed, that we grow amid competition, sometime fierce. Yet Matthew says, the landowner knows what’s out there, he knows the children of God from the children of this world, and he’ll tend to each according to his word in His good time.

What Paul says in Romans 8:18-20 about our “present sufferings” amounts to an explanation of Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the weeds and the wheat – it helps us understand, if not fully, or easily, why our Lord would say something so audacious as that in his creation evil will have a field day too. If, Paul says, a child is a child of the light, of God, and you are, then you are so only because the faith planted in you keeps you hanging on come “*weeds or high water*”!

Evil competes hard for space and time in this world, it stands right up and all but convinces us it’s taller and hardier and the sun no longer sees us under its’ canopy. It forgets, or cares not to confront the inconvenient

truth that children of the light grow best when they grow amidst competition. John 1:5 and again 1:9 says, the evil one has never figured out what to do about light that comes from within a person – it can't smother what it can't see - God put it where evil can't touch it!!!

Nothing about this story of the wheat and the weeds should suggest to us that sin be ignored, if anything it is a healthy reminder of how intertwined it is with and in us – how close it is to us always and how hard it can be to recognize. Sin is personal, but it is also, as we've heard lately and appropriately with regard to race, communal, systemic – so often in our country the inherent goodness of liberty becomes entwined with privilege or personal choice. Pity us if we get used to the weeds but all the more if they distract us from the hope within us. Remember, our light comes from within.

There is a certain amount of exertion required of a Christian – the parable should also not suggest to us a passivity about being a child of light – Paul tells us that a little groaning is to be expected and is not such a bad thing. Paul in fact says that is precisely what the Spirit of your forgiver and Lord Jesus is doing all the time on your behalf. Jesus knows that your life is and never will be a garden party. So, while Jesus is never testy with us he does test us with this story. Alert, reasonable people as we pride ourselves to be, we probably would say we wouldn't do things the way he does - we're "weeders" by nature until that is, the tugging we're disposed to do on all the sin "out there" creates this nagging feeling that someone is tugging at something "right in here." The Spirit does indeed have a way of helping us in our weakness.

So, when for genuine reasons, you long for God to act, to put the world right, remember that with one self-examined heart at a time, God has already done so – through the resurrection of Jesus. The sin in us and the wrong all around us knows it had its day, and it's over. Confessed, sin will only see the grace of God. Unconfessed, it will see judgement. But you, confessors...you wait upon a day full of grace not as people wondering if anyone will ever bring to this world a small light to counter it's darkness, but as people who know the Son is already up, and we're simply waiting for the brightness of midday to shine. And shine it will. AMEN