

**The Reverend Heinz D. Raidel**  
**Sermon, Eighth Sunday of Pentecost, 2023**  
**July 16, 2023**

**Tell us about the weeds!** That is the question the disciples had for Jesus.

Jesus's disciples heard the parable we just read about weeds and the enemy in the field and they wanted an explanation. Maybe they wanted to know exactly who this "enemy" was. Maybe they wanted to know who was scattering the metaphorical weed seeds in the wheat fields of their lives. Maybe they wanted to know how could they stop the person scattering the weed seed, the enemy, the source of the harm and horror, the pain and suffering of the people? Maybe they wanted to know how they could stop evil which was represented by weeds in the story.

**Tell us about the weeds!** The disciples said.

Jesus knew a lot about the evil the weeds and weed seeds represented in his story. He grew up with it all around him. He was a poor Jew who grew up in a powerless minority group. He lived in a metaphorical field full of the injustice weed and suffering weed and not the manicured gardens of the rich and powerful. The Jews were being choked out by the weedy Romans who ruled over most of their fields and their lives. They were losing land to that had been their families for generations. The Roman weeds were choking out their livelihood. They were losing their way of life, the few things they owned, and they were afraid. How would they survive? The Jews were looking for that Messiah-someone to overthrow the enemy, someone to pull out the choking weeds they knew as the Romans.

**Just Tell us about the weeds!** The entire nation of Israel was asking that question.

The Jews wanted to know how they could be delivered from injustice. And some of them had their own gardening or weed pulling ideas. Not so effective as history shows... with all efforts to weed out injustice, there were groups of Jews, or factions, with their own ideas, their own plans, based on faith in themselves not so much in God. One of the groups, the Sadducees, you remember them as the rich, politically powerful and ultras conservative Jewish faction. They wanted to get along as well as they could, play nice with the Romans. It was good for them and good for their businesses. Maintain the status quo, don't stir things up. The Sadducees thought their way out of injustice was to embrace those perpetrating the injustice. Be a part of the problem and it would go away...that did not work, even for the powerful Sadducees.

The **Pharisees**, the group mostly concerned about proper worship and following Jewish law, (who believed in angels and life after death you might remember so they were a little more open to Jesus.) Pharisees wanted to slowly change the system through the system. They thought gradual reform was the answer. Their tactic would not work in the real world because the Romans would never go away. Then as now, Evil never gives up its own grip on power easily or at all.

And you may not have heard of the **Essenes**, another group of Jews. They sought refuge from the weeds of injustice through life in the desert. They lived a life of withdrawal and separation. They thought the Romans would not want to mess with them if they had nothing the Romans wanted to mess with. They too were wrong. The famous dead seas scrolls are believed to have originated with the Essenes who buried them in caves they hid in. But they too were wrong, the Romans found them and destroyed them also.

And then there were the **Zealots**, (the word zealous, which means fanatical comes from their name) who thought of themselves as Freedom fighters and sought battle with the Romans as the answer. They were tragically wrong. They duked it out with the Romans and lost in 77ad, none survived, and the temple was destroyed by the Romans in the short one sided war. All these factions wanted to be ready to start eradicating the weeds of Roman rule in their own ways.

**But what about the weeds? The question the Jews were asking was definitely answered by Jesus in the parable in a dramatic way.**

You know that parables are a literary form used by ancient people. Parables use hyperbole or exaggeration to make points. Parables are always metaphorical. Parables can mean different things to different readers and generations. They have a message for the original audience and they have a message for us. Jesus parable of good seeds and bad seeds was transparent and it was real for the people. The good seed represented good in their world. The bad seed represented the real presence of evil in their world. And the good and the evil battled for control in the fields which the people depended on for their survival. Jesus gave the people parable which was a dramatic almost theatrical presentation. The parable was a life drama of the age old battle between good and evil. Kind of like a Star Wars for the people of the first century.

Jesus told the people to take a long range view of this battle between the seeds of good and evil.

Jesus said I may sound like a doomsday prophet but people, just tend to the garden.

Jesus said don't fool yourself and think you can pull the weeds by yourself- you'll just hurt the crop as well.

Jesus said take care of the garden, I (Jesus) will take care of the harvest.

Jesus said take care of my people, I will take care of the evil.

Jesus said trust in me, I will deal with the evil.

**But come on, What about the weeds?**

2000 years later, we also look around and see injustice. We see the colossal scope of sin and greed and violence in our lives and in our lives and in our worlds. We see economic imbalances which translate to boom and bust for some and not for others. We see surplus in some places and hunger in others. We live in a world where we can't help but notice that it seems that every day injustice, sin, greed, and violence of one sort or another chokes out the efforts of good people. And we see sin and evil deeds rewarded opulently and lavishly with everything extravagant and excessive the world can possibly offer. We see the sweet deals offered the politicians and the powerful, and we all probably know of a friend or a neighbor who cheats the system and profiting wildly. We see the weeds all around us for sure.

**And it is okay to admit this, people of God... we want to do some weeding of our own.**

We want to weed out the evil-doers, the lazy people, the uninspired people, and everyone else. But we realize that sometimes in our personal lives it doesn't seem as if we can savor the good without also somehow sampling the evil. We are not that much different from the disciples and the Jews, and when we read this passage we want to know, and we look to God and we ask...

**Lord, What about the weeds?**

And yes, Jesus answers us the same way with this same parable: Tend to the garden, take care of my people, don't think you can pull the weeds by yourself, you'll just damage the crop. So trust Jesus.

**Trust Jesus, because the good news is that Jesus told the disciples and us that he would indeed take care of the evil once and forever.**

But understand that trusting Jesus is hard work, because trusting Jesus is not just sitting idly and waiting. Trusting Jesus does not excuse us from our call to look, for, find, and deal with the weeds which choke the good out of our world. Trusting Jesus - this is not a command to sit idly by and let little weeds become big weeds. And trusting Jesus does not excuse us from being courageous in pulling weeds which threaten the lives, health and welfare of our world. Trusting Jesus does not change our command to look out for the folks who need

looking out for. It doesn't change our command to help the powerless and the poor and children. I don't think it changes our command to name and pull the weeds which cause sickness, pain, suffering and hate.

The very big thing about trusting Jesus and engaging evil in our world is we have to be very very sure that what we are doing is pulling the weeds which God wants us to pull. We have to be very sure through prayer and discernment that we're not simply pulling what we think are weeds and calling it God's will. We are called to make sure we're not making the mistake of just putting God's stamp of approval on what we *want* to do. We are called to be very very certain that we're not just assuming that our will is God's will and vice versa.

I know this is not easy, but one last thing.

**So, last time, what about the weeds?**

**We will be very well to remember one critical thing about this parable and what it calls us to do:** This parable calls us to pull weeds for sure, but it calls us first and foremost to understand and celebrate God as the master gardener. God as the master gardener.

**Word. Amen.**