

July 17, 2011 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 "Seeds and Weeds"

**There is so much good in the worst of us,
And so much bad in the best of us,
That it hardly behooves any of us
To talk about the rest of us. –Gov. Edward Wallis Hoch of KS (1849-1925)**

In the Isaiah reading we heard twice that there is no other God. In Romans, we are told to hope for what we do not have and to wait for it patiently. In Matthew, we hear the parable of the wheat and the weeds, along with its explanation, and we are reminded of the reality of the presence of evil in our world (and of the final judgment). And it's not just the supernatural evil that we are to look out for, but also those who slander others w/malicious talk/gossip – that is another kind of evil that chokes out the good.

The workers approach their master in disbelief when they see weeds coming up w/the wheat b/c they know that only good seed had been planted. The master tells them that an enemy has done it in the night and the workers immediately think they know what the master wants them to do – pull out the weeds. "No, let the weeds grow along w/the wheat," the master tells them.

Talk about gardening experience for David and me – if you see our garden, you may think we go w/the "let the weeds grow w/the rest" theory. It's so hard to weed once you let them grow b/c they are rooted in and you take out the "good stuff w/the weeds. We sometimes let things grow b/c we aren't sure of what are flowers and what are weeds. I don't always know the difference. (Maybe something to take to heart when we look at people and see everyone as children of God; not try to divide them into good and bad.)

Joy's story about gardening and weeding and having a neat row of flowers – only to be asked later why she was only growing thistles in her flower bed.

Dan asking us why we were growing alfalfa in our flower bed.

Story of being youth director in IN from 1996-2000. Visiting all families w/youth on my list. Some hadn't been to the church since they were baptized and now were teenagers. One youth I was to visit was described as a "bad seed" and I was told that it would be a waste to even visit him b/c he wouldn't want to come to anything. I went to their house. He was one of the most active in the youth group.

Story of Dennis Rader – member of Christ Lutheran Church in Wichita, KS. Maybe his name sounds familiar to you. He was a family man, a council president, a scout leader, a church usher. He appeared to be a "good seed", yet something evil lurked w/I him. The BTK Killer

began in January 1974 and wrote about it until 1979 and was never caught. Then, he seemed to disappear until an article was published in the paper on the 30th anniversary in March 2004 about the killings. And then the BTK Killer wrote and again. This time he was caught. It was Dennis Rader. This man told his pastor that he felt that evil possessed him and that killing was the only way to act out.

Who's a weed? Who's wheat? It's hard for us to make decisions about people and do the weeding.

"God allows sinners and saints to live together and grow together right up to harvest time. It is too hard for us to separate the weeds from the wheat w/o hurting the wheat. It's not our job. Let's allow God to do it." (from a resource book)

We might want to disagree w/letting the weeds grow b/c in a garden, when you do that, the weeds choke out the flowers and what's planted in the garden. Yes, there are times for weeding – for discipline and for justice. Sometimes the weeds must come out so that the good seed is not choked out. Someone like the BTK Killer receives justice and pays for his crimes. Congregations can confront a leader, including a pastor, about their behavior when needed, but that's different than a person making a judgment on the final judgment – which belongs to God.

Sometimes there are small groups among us who want to do a bit of weeding. Their intentions are good b/c they're trying to be servants of God for their master. They think that they know God's wishes and are going to help God eliminate sin. The Pharisees of Jesus' day sought to be good weeders. In fact, they labeled Jesus and his followers as weeds. Weeders can easily make wrong judgments. When plants are young, it's hard to tell the difference between weeds and wheat. (Brian Stoffregen idea)

Jesus was not a weeder. He didn't weed out Judas from the 12, even though, according to some accounts, he knew about the upcoming betrayal. He didn't weed out Peter even though Jesus knew of his upcoming denials. If Jesus were to weed out all the imperfect people, who would be left? (Those w/o sin, cast the first stone.)

The good news: The Lord doesn't suppress the weeds immediately; "God's call to conversion in on-going." (resource book) It's God's call – it'll be God's final judgment, and not our judgment. God reaches out to all through Jesus Christ – constantly – showing forgiveness and new life. Those things are given to you as gifts to build you up b/c you are called as a disciple to be the wheat giving life, not through ourselves, but through Christ.

We don't label who's a weed and who's wheat. Is it possible that weeds growing alongside of the wheat can become good seed? Pray for those we consider weeds. You never know, someone may be praying for us!

Go and scatter the life-giving word of God that was first given to you.

Things to think about:

Do you know anyone who's perfectly good all the time?

"The number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny Him with their lifestyles is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable."

--Theologian Karl Rahner

"Choose your enemies carefully b/c you become like them." It's easy to become intolerant w/intolerant people; angry w/angry people, etc."

Use a rope for kids to do a tug of war. Today's gospel story is good and bad tugging at each other. But it's hard to simply look at it as 2 sides. It's not that easy. Leave it up to God b/c God cares about all of us and wants good for all of us. (create a circle w/rope). We hope we can share the good.

Story: A young child asks her father, "Why don't you go to church?" He replies, "Because the church is full of hypocrites." "What's a hypocrite?" she asks. He thought for a moment and answered, "A hypocrite says one thing and does something else." "That sounds like you, Daddy! She replies. "I'm no hypocrite!" He responded. "Yes you are," she said. "You say that going to church is important. You say that I have to go to church, but then you don't go. You say one thing and do another. Doesn't that make you a hypocrite?"

Discerning God's will takes Bible study, prayer and the wisdom of God's community

Helpful Resources

- *The parables of Jesus*, Arland Hultgren
- Notes from class on The Gospel of Matthew as taught by Mary Hinkle Shore at Luther Seminary
- *Crossmarks* online resource, Brian Stoffregen