

Weeds are terrible things aren't they? Most of them are unsightly, unattractive, they can make our yards look messy and uncared for. Weeds also take water away from plants that need it the most, they take up space in our gardens, and can actually kill the plants that they are growing with. And at times it seems that no matter how much weeding we do, they always seem to grow back.

One of the things that disturbs me the most about them however, is that for someone like myself, who is not an avid gardener, I find it rather difficult sometimes to tell the difference between a plant and a weed. In the past when I helped my dad with yard work I had to ask him countless times to clarify for me which ones were weeds and which ones were plants. Yet, even after he showed me, sometimes I still end up accidentally pulling up a plant or two.

This idea that it can be difficult for us to tell the difference between plants and weeds is used by Jesus in today's Gospel message to help the disciples, and us, to understand that we are to avoid passing judgment on others because ultimately it is up to God to do the judging and the weeding. It can also help guide us into a continued understanding of what being a true disciple, a true believer, is all about. As Christians our task is not to pull up the false, but to plant and sow the Word of God, while working on being the best possible wheat that we can be! Now last week we heard the parable of the sower, in which we learned that we are to prepare our hearts to be good soil, soil that not only hears God's word but acts on it by producing the fruit of good works. This week we continue to learn about what it means to be a faithful disciple, good wheat, as we explore another famous parable told by Jesus.

In today's story we discover that the central problem is found not among the weeds, or even in the evil one sowing the false seeds, but rather it is found in the impatience of the slaves and in their assumption that they knew exactly what their Lord wished! Notice that although the servants are eager, and willing, to go out

into the field to do the weeding, they are told by their master to let the weeds grow. Now, for those of us who despise weeding, this is rather good news, but for the gardeners among us, this may sound like a fairly bad idea. We typically spend a lot of time and money keeping the weeds out of our yards and gardens, and the idea that a farmer would actually tell his servants to let them grow is almost laughable. Nevertheless, as we dive deeper into this parable we will begin to see that the farmer had good reasons for waiting until the harvest to do the weeding.

At first glance, the master's response to the servants that, "in gathering the weeds they would uproot the wheat along with them," might not make much sense to those listening to Jesus' story, or to us. Wouldn't experienced field hands be able to tell the difference between a parcel of wheat and a patch of weeds, and wouldn't they be able to gather up the weeds without harming the wheat? Well, according to biblical scholars the type of weed that Jesus is talking about is most likely darnel, a type of plant that is indistinguishable from wheat.

Ok...So what is Jesus trying to get the crowd, the disciples, and us to understand about our failure to identify plants correctly? We know that his disciples were a bit confused by his parable, because later in the story they actually confront their teacher in private and ask him to explain it to them. We can't really blame them though for their confusion! Remember, in last week's Gospel, a parable his disciples had heard only minutes before today's parable, Jesus had taught them that the presence of weeds in the field can choke out the good seed and prevent it from producing fruit. If this is the case shouldn't the master want his servants to go out and get rid of the weeds, even though they may accidentally pull up some wheat with them? Like the disciples we too may need Jesus to reveal the meaning of this parable in order to fully understand his reasons for allowing them to grow.

The answer is found when Jesus explains that he is the master in the story, the wheat are the children of God, the weeds are the children of the devil, and the field is the world. Although we might come to the conclusion that his explanation provides us with a reason for there being good and bad people living among us, the main point Jesus is trying to make.... is that God is the one who will determine the righteous from the unrighteous. God will be the one who will send his angels to gather up the weeds. God will be the one to judge who the evildoers are in this world. This understanding is supported by what Jesus had declared earlier in Matthew when he tells his disciples, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.”

Again, the weeds and wheat in our story do not present the deeper problem in today’s parable. The problem lies with the impatient slaves who are all too eager to go out into the field and clean it up. They think that they know what their lord wants, they think they know what is best; but their actions would be even more destructive than the presence of the weeds. Their actions would in fact have far worse consequences than those of the “enemy!” As Jesus points out, if the servants were to go out and weed they would uproot and destroy some wheat.

Which begs the question, how often in our own lives do we act like the slaves in this parable? How often do we think that we know exactly what God wants and then take it upon ourselves to pass judgment on those whom we view to be weeds? We witness the Pharisees and chief priests doing this constantly throughout all four Gospels on multiple occasions. They sought to be good “weederers” and considered Jesus and his group as some of the weeds that needed to be taken care of.

Now I don’t know about you, but sometimes I find it rather difficult trying to decide if someone is a weed or if they are wheat. I also see in myself the ability to be like the servants in the parable wanting to go out and do the weeding, thinking I

know what God wants. When this happens I have to be reminded that sometimes weeds can turn out to be wheat. Looks can be deceiving! Consider the following story...

When country singer Lonzo Green's nephew Jimmy asked him to tune a friend's guitar, he agreed. The problem was, Jimmy's friend was from the wrong side of the tracks and Jimmy's parents wouldn't allow his friend inside their home. So they met outside. As the child approached, Green noticed his self-consciousness demeanor and sidewise glances at the upscale neighborhood. Lonzo Green, who'd experienced poverty and discrimination in his own life, tuned the boy's old guitar, played a few songs and taught him some chords. The young man thanked him and left with a warm memory he'd carry throughout the rest of his remarkable life. Eventually that boy crossed the tracks for good with his guitar, a soft polite drawl, and a hesitant smile, and was never unwelcome again. That's because the boy who wasn't allowed in Jimmy's house was ... Elvis Presley.

So what is it exactly that makes a person wheat instead of a weed? Is a person considered to be wheat because they go to Church on Sunday mornings? Are they a weed if they don't? Could they be wheat if they attend weekly bible studie,s or are active participants within their congregation? Are they a weed if instead they choose to participate in other activities? I believe that a person can demonstrate that they are wheat in how they live out their lives on a daily basis for Christ, remembering that ultimately it is God who is the final judge.

When I was growing up I can remember a few occasions when I would run to my parents and tattle on my twin brother Michael after he did something wrong. My parents usually responded to my tattling by telling me that I needed to worry about myself, and let them worry about what Michael was doing! I think this is what Jesus is trying to get the crowd and us to understand in his story. Remember when Jesus told the Pharisees who loved sitting in judgment of others: "How can

you see the speck in your brothers eye, if you can not see the log in your own eye?!” In other words, leave the judging to God!

All of us have within us the ability to be weeds in which we allow sin to control our lives, causing us to doubt, and to live our lives selfishly instead of living our lives for God. We also have the ability to be wheat, in which we remember that through Christ we are forgiven, and that sin does not need to control our lives! Through Christ we are called to live our lives according to God’s will, not our own. Instead of judging others, and focusing on their faults and what they are doing wrong, we need to work on ourselves trusting that God knows what is best!

Keep in mind that a “weeders” judgmental attitude towards others, is a prime indication that their thoughts and actions have been sown by the “enemy” rather than by our God, who is both gracious and merciful. Jesus did not weed out Judas from the twelve, even though, according to some accounts, he knew about the upcoming betrayal before it occurred. Jesus did not weed out Peter from the twelve, even though he knew about his upcoming denials. And despite the fact that Jesus knew all of the disciples would run away and abandon him –he didn’t try to pull them up or spray them with roundup. They weren’t producing the fruit that was expected of them –but he did not weed them out of the fellowship. We know that eventually his disciples did become good Wheat as they formed the early church and witnessed to all about the love and forgiveness of God!

Now.....although the weeds in wheat field are an issue in our parable, it is not a problem that we, as God’s servants, are going to solve on our own, especially if the field is defined as “the world”. We will not, and we do not have the power, to remove all the evil from the world, and as Jesus declares we are not to be judges. The reason for this stems from the problem faced in today’s parable of being unable to tell the weeds apart from the wheat. Yet, we can find hope in the fact

that Christ can tell the difference, and because of his grace, mercy, and love, we know that he will be a kind and fair judge.

Keep in mind though that even though we are to refrain from judging others this does not mean that we are to just sit back and do nothing. We need to look within ourselves to see if we might be a cause of sin, if we may be ignoring the law, if we are being wicked toward others. As servants of God we are not called to do the weeding, or the judging for that matter, but rather we are called to grow in our faith, we are called to grow as good wheat, by loving our neighbors and our enemies, by bearing the fruit of good works wherever we go, and by planting God's Word in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and any location outside the walls of First Lutheran! Thanks be to God! Amen