

Proper 11 A
Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43
July 23rd, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

WEEDS

"But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared."

We have become a weed-obsessed society. Billions of dollars are spent each year trying to control the growth of unwanted, undesirable weeds. This money is spent on our lawns, gardens, but much of it on our farms. Chemicals like Monsanto's *Round-Up* are not only used to control weeds at the consumer level, but also in agriculture. However, *Round-Up* is so toxic, you are banned from disposing of it in land-fills and it requires special handling to get rid of it. Farmers soon learned that the chemical cocktail not only killed the weeds on their farms, but also the crops, so Monsanto, which also provides much of the seed for this industry, developed a *Round-Up* tolerant variety of wheat, soy and corn seed which can survive treatments from the weed treatment of *Round-Up*. This genetic manipulation gave strength to the fledgling Organic Movement, which argued that the consequences of manipulating our food sources genetically may become problematic for our own health. So while we try to root out the weeds, we might conclude, we also disturb the good wheat soy and corn we are trying to grow.

Does this sound at all familiar?

Have you ever noticed in the battle to stem the take-over of weeds in your lawn, that when you pull out the dandelions with roots that stretch through the center of our planet and come out the other side in China, that you very often uproot the good grasses along with the undesirable weeds and that you leave a big gaping hole behind? This new hole is fertile territory for new weeds to grow back, especially from the seeds of the dandelion you just disturbed and which help spread the weed seeds throughout your lawn.

Weeds-they can really bother us and our sense of a well-ordered, well-controlled world. Where do they come from? We spend so much time trying to make over an environment to be exactly the way we desire or expect it to turn out, only to be reminded that nothing is perfect, and in a beautiful lawn of Kentucky Blue Grass, there are bound to be one or two dandelions that blow there from someone else's lawn. The operative learning here is that *nothing is perfect*.

Weeds are connected with the word control. You are tempted to buy products labeled "Weed Control" at your local garden center. We want to control them before they take control of our gardens and our lawns.

Weeds can also be a metaphor for other unwanted things in our lives like bad habits or bad people. We want to pull these weeds out of our lives, but find it is difficult because they are so rooted in our lives and the way we live. It is easy to say to someone *'you should control your bad habits.'* It is quite another thing to do it. And when we fail to control our habits, we are made to feel like we are morally deficient for not doing so, as though we gladly choose to continue dwelling alongside the weeds in our lives.

Weeds remind us that nature will take over our well-tended plots if we do not care for them and tend to them and root out the invaders. I recently visited my campsite in Woodstock, Connecticut. I have not been up there very much this year. Some of my gardens had become overgrown with weeds. It is amazing how quickly nature wants to reclaim the land you have tilled so carefully for many years. I can testify to this also when I go hiking in the woods and see the remnants of farms, completely overgrown by trees and shrubbery in less time than my lifespan on this earth. Change is what we can count on. Nothing stays as it was. Or maybe it yearns to return to the way it was before we started to mess with it!

Round up, as I mentioned earlier, is a powerful weed killer. A friend of ours who had a beautiful, "Kentucky Blue Grass" near perfect lawn that she had tended and developed over several years, loved her small yard and kept everything, including the gardens pristine. She spoke to her landscaper a few weeks ago and asked him if he could do something about a little bit of crabgrass that was taking hold in her lawn from a neighbor's yard. Big mistake. The landscaper mixed a strong cocktail of *Round-Up* and killed her entire lawn. Recently, I drove by the house to take a look and it was *beyond* brown. The entire lawn was dead. It looked bizarre amidst the other beautifully tended lawns in the neighborhood. Rooting out the few weeds destroyed her beautiful lawn. I would be very angry if I were her. What's even worse, is that 90% of the time she had taken care of the lawn, tending to its needs herself, until she entrusted it to a "professional."

The point is, that the weeds became of greater concern than the rest of the lawn. Who determines what is a weed? Are weeds weeds to God?

Jesus seems to be trying to say to us that it would be better to leave the weeds in place, rather than risking pulling out them out and risk uprooting the good people also. I suspect the parable he tells us this morning is by way of answering the age-old question of why God allows evil and bad people to exist in the world. Many people lose their faith over this question. We struggled with it in Connecticut when the killings of little children happened in Newtown a few years ago. Now all you have to do is mention the name of the town and the tragedy seems forever linked with it. Why does God allow such evil to exist? And why is such evil allowed to snuff out the life of a good, hardworking handyman, Jeff Worrell, sitting on his favorite park bench near his home at 2:00 pm last Sunday afternoon in Hartford, an innocent bystander to the gang violence which is too prevalent these days. Why are weeds like these allowed to exist along side good people who work hard to make their communities a better place, as this man was committed to doing? I got angry when I read the story, I don't know about you. But then, we are left with the question of who decides who is a weed and what makes them one?

There was a powerful scene in the movie, *The Shack*, when the father was asked to make such a choice between his son and his daughter. He could not do that, and offered himself instead. God then asked him how he expected him to judge between his children, and to understand he gave himself instead.

We must live with weeds, patiently. We should focus on what will make our own root system stronger, and that rootedness is in God through Jesus Christ. Let us focus less on the weeds as the good wheat in this world, and make it our task to raise that wheat up. AMEN

