

“To Weed or not to Weed, That's a Tricky Question”

**Matthew 13:24-43** <sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. <sup>27</sup> "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' <sup>28</sup> "An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' <sup>29</sup> "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" <sup>31</sup> He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. <sup>32</sup> Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." <sup>33</sup> He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount {<sup>33</sup> Greek three satas (probably about 1/2 bushel or 22 liters)} of flour until it worked all through the dough." <sup>34</sup> Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. <sup>35</sup> So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world." {<sup>35</sup> Psalm 78:2} <sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." <sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. <sup>40</sup> "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

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To weed or not to weed, now there's a tricky question. The neighbourhood that the manse is in has some very nice lawns in it and, quite frankly, a weedy lawn sticks out like a sore thumb. It's an odd situation over there because the soil is especially sandy and is not good for growing grass in the first place. It's not farmland down where we're at. And to give the weed its due, there are certain weeds that are able to store water much better than grass and they thrive. If left alone they would develop a more robust ground cover and would in the end be best for the soil. But, for some reason we think that grass is what's supposed to be there so we dump all kinds of chemicals into the ground that kill the indigenous plants, the weeds, and then fertilize to create artificially good soil conditions for grass. These herbicides and additives may give a greener, grassier lawn but in the end only effect the ecosystem negatively, particularly the aquatic life. I think they've outlawed all of the herbicides that are harmful to humans, but that doesn't give us free reign to abuse other forms of life.

I've often wondered why grass is the preferred ground cover for a lawn. In the first

## “To Weed or not to Weed, That's a Tricky Question”

place it is a food source not for us but for livestock. In my neighbourhood, if we were to keep livestock in the front yard, people would look down upon us thinking we're dirty. Actually, the dandelion suits human life quite well as a source for food, and not only food but also wine, and herbal medication. Did you know that the dandelion leaf is a richer source of Vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron than is spinach. Down south we always said that a mess of greens three times a year kept the system cleaned out. The milky juice of the dandelion can supposedly be used as bug repellent and a wart remover. It would make more sense for us to fill our lawns with dandelions than grass and if not dandelions then spinach. Spinach does kind of good over there. But..., since we are into food sources just outside our front doors I suppose a well manicured lawn of grass meets some deep psychological need in us to show that our wheat fields are plentiful, so plentiful that we can use miniature wheat for ornamentation and then to have a weed free lawn would mean that we are very successful. But, in the end we must remember that a weed is only a plant that grows where we don't want it to grow. What we call weeds in the yard are called wild flowers when they are along the Caledon Trailways. Why does a wild flower growing in our yard have to wind up being a deep-seeded psychological insult to what we call prosperity. Yet, we must ask if our vain sense of prosperity and success is worth the negative impact on our local ecosystem that destroying weeds and having grass lawns causes.

Weeds in food crops are an entirely different matter. Weeds didn't become weeds until humanity became agriculturally based. Before that, weeds were simply plants in the flora that could be food or a remedy for this or for that and were left to grow where they grew. Yet, in a field of wheat or in a garden weeds can wreak havoc on food production. Someone did a study which showed that weeds and food plants can co-exist up to three weeks in a plot of soil without encroaching upon one another's water and nutrients. But, if a weed goes four weeks crop reduction can be reduced as much as 50% depending on the plants involved. When it comes to actual food production unwanted plants must be removed.

So anyway, moving on to this parable of the sower we be surprised that the sower tells his servants to let the wheat and the weeds grow together. That's preposterous, you would think in the world of producing as much food as you can from a single crop. But, the sower gives his reason and its a good one. If they were to pull up the weeds, they would also uproot the wheat with it and destroy the whole crop. Hmm...How can that be? Well, you have to know that there is a somewhat poisonous weed present particularly in Israel and Syria called the darnel. When it is sprouting it looks like wheat and you can't tell the two apart until it is too late. While sprouting the darnel will intertwine its roots with the surrounding plants so that if you try to pull it up you will destroy the roots of its neighbors as well. We must applaud that weed for it's genius. The only way to deal with darnel in a wheat field is to let it grow along with the wheat until harvest time. At harvest time the way you tell them apart is that the wheat stalks will be bowing over because of the weight of the seed while the darnel stalk will be standing straight up. Then you can just go through the field pulling up the darnel and gathering it together and then on a second pass pick up the wheat.

Jesus uses this parable to describe the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is being sown into the world as individual who have been made alive by God in Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. But, there are also weeds sown by Satan that look like the children of the kingdom but are evil facsimiles. The only way to tell them apart is at harvest time when the children of the kingdom are bowing over from the weight of the fruits they have born, a gesture of humble worship, the children of the evil one are standing straight up, their empty friends baring no weight, saying “pick me first. I'm worthy. I've born fruit.”

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Well, if we were to look at the world today, the field, we would not be too far afield to say that it looks like there was way more bad seed sown than good. There is a great deal of evil in the world and we all seem to be infected with it. That preliminary rule when talking about evil is that it has infected everything making it so that there is no non-hypocritical way anyone of us can point a finger at somebody else without first pointing the finger at ourselves. We each have done evil things even when at the time it seemed like the right thing to do. We are all “sinners” if I may use that label. We have all done evil and if we want God or government to go on an evil-cleansing tirade in this world then we have to be prepared to let the tirade start with us each. They say you should never use Mother Teresa as a sermon example, but I am sure that even she would admit to having a very evil heart. Actually, one of the first signs of a true Christian is a recognition of the evil; in ones own heart and when we see how utterly evil we are in our own hearts, it becomes clear that only God can help us.

So, it may be that each of us at some point will be willing to take the long, disturbing path of looking deep at our own hearts and lives and instead of saying, “I'm a good and successful person. Just look at my front yard. By gummit, its weed-free and I did it my way;” instead of saying that sort of non-sense we compare ourselves to, let's say, the Ten Commandments or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. When we compare ourselves to God's will for us, we honestly can say nothing other than “I” am unable and have been unable to do anything other than fail on most to all points considered when it comes to being a human being standing before this God who when we meet him we find he is steadfastly loving and faithful in all he does towards us. This God that we humans have so often shaken our fingers at saying, “ God, if you really loved us, if you really existed, you would destroy all this evil in the world”, but because we are so vain we don't realize that in asking God to do that we're asking God to get us each too. The problem of evil in this world is very much like the darnel.

With this parable Jesus has stated the truth that it is God's business to rid the creation of evil, not humanity's. Even in the end, humanity doesn't get to rid the creation of evil for Jesus says God will command the angels to gather up that which causes people to sin and those who prefer to live according to evil rather than any semblance of the good. God has other plans for how we should deal with evil in this world and in ourselves. The sower says “Let them both grow together.” Let the good seed and bad seed grow together because trying to uproot the evil will only destroy the good. The war on terror is a good example of this. The effort to root out some very evil people has more so destroyed the lives of otherwise good people and killed many innocent people in an effort to protect the Western lifestyle. It is as if we thought terrorism was simply a weed in our lawns. Returning evil for evil never works.

Jesus says “Let them both grow together.” The word for “let” in the Greek language of the New Testament just happens to be the same word for “forgive” and our English translations really do not capture the depth of the meaning of that Greek word. Simple permission, simply letting evil to grow in our midst is not what we are supposed to glean from this parable. In the very least the word in Greek means tolerate, tolerate the evil in our midst. Toleration in the very least requires that we be able to recognize what is evil in this world and in ourselves. Toleration requires active participation on our part not just a simple act of permission. When we tolerate something that means we struggle and suffer to learn how to live with something in our lives that we don't want there but yet can't get rid of. Moreover, the full meaning of this word in Greek is that the way we struggle and suffer to learn how to live with the evil in our midst and in ourselves is to forgive it. There is a huge difference between simply permitting evil in the world and forgiving the evil in the world. Forgiving those who do evil is actually a very powerful means of combating evil in the world. Forgiving those who sin

“To Weed or not to Weed, That's a Tricky Question”

against us, showing mercy is indeed the only means of uprooting evil at our disposal. Forgiveness disarms evil and prevents it from rooting in with our roots in the New Creation in Christ Jesus. God's way of rooting up the weeds is to forgive each of us the weeds of our own participation in evil and to transform us to be good seed. Good seed grows like the mustard seed. It grows as powerfully as yeast in bread. Friends we have all been forgiven by God. Let the good seed of forgiveness grow. It will take over the world. That's God's promise. Amen.