

**LIVING WITH WEEDS**  
***Sermon for Pentecost 6A—Mt. 13:24-30:36-43***  
LPC, 7/20/14

Lawrencefield is a pretty harmonious church, but I've known others where a member or two might be heard to say something like, "If it weren't for [fill in the blank] this church would be all right." You can fill in the blank various ways: If it weren't for the rabble-rousers, or the Old Guard, or the rector, or the bishop, or the national church, or maybe some one member in particular.

Since we haven't, to my knowledge, that problem around here, perhaps such a thought has crossed your mind in an office setting: "If it weren't for so-and-so, we could get some work done around here." Or maybe at one time or another, you've thought this way about the political situation, "Things would be perfect if such-and-such would just go away." Here you can fill in the blank with the name of a particular politician, or a political party, or a special interest group.

I use these examples to get you thinking about who may be the weeds in your life – those people who for you resemble the bad seed in Jesus' parable.

As you heard, in this story, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a field in which a farmer sowed good seed. However during the night some vandal sows weeds, so that the good and the bad plants grow intermingled. The farmer refuses to have the field weeded, for fear of disturbing the good plants, advising his employees to wait until harvest time to sort the good from the bad.

A little word study may be helpful at this point. The word translated "weeds" is *zizania* in Greek. *Zizanium* is not a generic weed, but a particular poisonous plant that closely resembles wheat in appearance until the kernel appears. So it makes sense that the farmer does not want it ripped out prematurely. It's too hard to tell from appearances what is wheat and what is *zizanium*. In the effort to eradicate the *zizanium*, a lot of wheat would probably be pulled out by mistake.

This raises the question, though: if *zizanium* so closely resembles wheat in its immature state, how were the servants so sure the field had been corrupted? Makes you wonder whether the servants were as innocent as they first appear! But I'll leave that for another day.

Helpfully, the Gospel of Matthew supplies an interpretation to this parable. The wheat and *zizanium* are children of God and the devil respectively, who will be allowed to grow together until Judgment Day, when God will sort them all out, admitting the righteous to heaven and consigning the evil to hell.

There are dangers, however, in leaving our thinking about this parable here. It would be possible, for example, to hear this story and assume that we, as the church of Christ, are the good seed and those other folks (here you can fill in the blanks the way we did at the beginning of this sermon) are the bad seed. In other words, "We're going to heaven and they're going to hell." Or maybe, "I'm going to heaven and you're going to hell." That interpretation would be not only unhelpful to one's further growth in faith,

The Very Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter

but, I believe, counter to Jesus' message. This story is more than a simplistic allegory about judgment.

This story is far more helpful as a cautionary tale about assuming we know what has to be done to make everything perfect. Because we don't. We may think we know exactly who or what has to change (or go!) to bring about the kingdom of heaven, but we don't. We can't tell the wheat from the zizanium at this stage. Everything is all mixed up together. Only God can sort it all out, which God will do in God's good time.

Furthermore, people are not like seeds. Unlike zizanium seeds, which cannot change their genetic structure and become wheat, bad people can become good, or good people break bad. Sometimes we're wheat, and sometimes we're weeds. We know this from our own experience, don't we?

Another point: we have both kinds of seed within us at the same time. We can do the right things for the wrong reasons, and the wrong thing for the right reasons.

Finally, this parable shows us that while God's creation is fundamentally good, any human endeavor is going to be a mixed bag. In most cases it isn't helpful for us to point fingers at whoever let evil in the door. Until God sorts everything out in God's good time, there will be evil in our midst. Deal with it.

This isn't to say that we should tolerate any evil that is in our power to correct. Jesus makes clear that to participate in the kingdom of heaven is to participate in God's work to feed, heal, promote justice, forgive and love. At the same time we followers of Jesus are not to fall prey to perfectionism, usurping God's power and prerogative to redeem the universe as God chooses.

The closing image I'd like to offer may not be directly applicable, but it's fresh in my mind and presents a courageous example of not succumbing to perfectionism.

The Tour de France is going on right now: the annual 3-week, 3,600km bicycle race, the most prestigious in the sport. The American favorite, Andrew Talansky, was at the start considered a contender, but suffered two terrible falls in the early stages. In last Wednesday's segment, he was in such pain he fell disastrously behind the field. At one point he dismounted his bike, sat down on a guardrail, and appeared to give himself over to pain and grief, his chances for victory utterly smashed.

This was not the race Talansky envisioned. This shouldn't be happening. How had it gone so wrong? Who let this evil happen? Eventually, however, Talansky got back on his bike, wiping tears, and finished the stage, a full half-hour after everyone else.

This is a theological moment on so many grounds. Here is an example of keeping on while racked by grief and pain, with no possibility of success and nothing apparent to gain. But it is also a beautiful example of letting go of preconceived notions of how things *should* be, and a dropping of any concern with what everyone else is or is not doing, to simply do what you have been given to do.

That, my friends, is the way to deal with weeds. At least the people kind.