

## HEALING PRESENCE

### *Sermon for Pentecost 7A—Rom 8:26-39, Mt 13:31-33, 44-52*

LPC, 7/27/14

Last week I spoke about the kind of attitude where a person thinks, “If it weren’t for [fill in the blank], things would be all right around here.” I spoke of this in the context of the parable of the wheat and the tares, which are all mixed up together in one field until the harvest. To make it easier to discuss today, I am going to refer to the “If it weren’t for [blank]” attitude as the Identified Weed Attitude.

As I pointed out last week, Identified Weed thinking is not particularly helpful. There will always be evil around us in this life, regardless of whom we identify as weeds. Wishing the weeds away is going to make no difference at all. And, as I also pointed out last week, Identified Weed thinking serves as a distraction from getting on with what we have to do.

What we have to do in particular will vary from person to person and situation to situation. But what we have to do in general is the same for all who would follow Jesus. What we have been given to do is follow in Jesus’ footsteps to work for the kingdom of heaven: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, liberating the captive, forgiving seventy times seven and loving neighbor as self.

There is additional danger in Identified Weed thinking that I’d like to explore a little more fully at the beginning of this sermon. Identified Weed thinking is a self-reinforcing habit. Simply put, the more you do it, well, the more you do it. The more you listen to other people doing it, the more you do it yourself.

The real problem lies in the fact that Identified Weed thinking is a form of anger. Unlike hot anger, however, Identified Weed thinking doesn’t spend itself. It takes up residence. It becomes a part of you. This is not constructive anger.

It’s been plain to me for some time that there’s a big honking lot of anger going around in this country right now. You can see it on Facebook and elsewhere on the internet. You hear it on TV and radio. You read it in newspapers and on billboards. You can observe it in Congress, for heaven’s sake.

The reason for this has got to have something to do with living in a culture that blogs. If you assume that whatever crosses your mind is worthy of publishing, there is bound to be a whole bunch of stuff circulating that people used to keep to themselves. Judging from the results of all of this public gut-spilling, this is not altogether a good development.

However, as I said last week, there is no sense wringing hands over what undeniably *is*. I think my exact words were, there is always going to be evil in the world—Deal with it.

So, how do we deal with all this public anger?

I had an insight while on retreat a few weeks ago. My insight is that much, if not all, of this anger that’s roiling invisibly around us, comes from pain.

Some people have suffered badly. They've lost jobs. They've lost income, security, pensions, homes. Some have not suffered in life-threatening ways, but have experienced the cumulative effects of societal changes that happen too fast to prepare for or to cope with. If they're young, they have no idea what's going to come of them. If they're old, they find that instead of being able to relax and enjoy their golden years, they are adrift in a world that's become unrecognizable to them. And if they're middle-aged, they are probably being torn in two directions as they care for both children and aging parents.

People are stressed. They are wounded. And they feel like they've had to give up a lot of things that are dear to them.

Think about this. Now think about what I said earlier: that all who would follow Jesus are called to be a healing presence in the world. What is the best way, do you think, of being a healing presence to people who are afraid, wounded or feeling bereft? Is it to add more angry words to the mix?

This is one of the many ways that being a Christian, *really* being a Christian, is counter-cultural. Christians refuse to participate in the culture of anger. We don't repost a Facebook rant, even if we happen to agree with it. When our friends express an Identified Weed attitude, we try not to add fuel to the fire by appending our own Identified Weed stories. If we engage people who disagree with us, we don't match their anger with anger of our own. We remind ourselves always that these are people who have probably been hurt. And we try to be healing, even if we don't like the person, or his or her opinions. This is kingdom of heaven behavior.

Kingdom of heaven behavior does not, generally, consist of grand gestures. Notice that Jesus uses many small, homely metaphors in describing the kingdom of heaven in today's Gospel lesson: the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, a measure of yeast, a fish net. The kingdom of heaven is often hidden, like a treasure in a field, and has to be unearthed. But, homely and hidden as it is, the kingdom of heaven is worth sacrificing everything else you have to own, like the single, perfect pearl.

Ultimately, our healing ministry to wounded people is going to be based on the knowledge that we too are wounded. We have our anger and fear, too, don't we? We have Identified Weed moments of our own. We know what it's like to feel like we've had to give up too much that is dear to us.

To this, Jesus tells us, as he says to all the wounded, the angry, the fearful: the kingdom of heaven is near. You already have that pearl of great price. You have my love, you have my forgiveness, you *matter*.

If we can know this and believe it, the kingdom of heaven really has come near. If we can somehow express this knowledge to others who are wounded, angry or fearful (whether or not we agree with their assessment of who the weeds are) the kingdom of heaven comes nearer still.