

Good Weeds

St. Ben's 7/23/2023

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy one.

As a child, I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. I was very blessed to have both sets play large roles in my life. I spent most of my summers with my grandma and grandpa Crompton. It was definitely better than daycare, and I learned so much in my time there. One summer, my grandma was teaching me all about gardening. We had to go out and prepare the garden for the pepper planting the next day. She showed me all the plants that had survived the previous seasons, those that hadn't and then she started showing me the weeds we had to pull. She wanted to make sure I knew the difference between a good weed and a bad weed. I told her that I didn't know there could be good weeds. She told me about Dandelions and Chickweed and how dandelions had healing properties. As a child, I always thought it was interesting how plants could be used as medicine, even weeds.

In today's Gospel, we encounter the parable of the weeds. As an important context for this text, we should remember that Matthew was written within the church community of Antioch toward the end of the first century. This community would have reflected the ethnic diversity common to larger cities. As the early religious community struggled with religious diversity, there was a growing sense of needing to identify those who were in and those who were out. One person may join the group with what seemed like similar beliefs, yet over time grew to show something very different. Causing conflict within the community as they struggled to find their common identity. These very common phases of community development may even sound familiar to us today without much translation or contextualization. It is very common for us to

separate ourselves into categories, binaries, and boxes. Are you with me or against me? You are a weed but I am wheat, and as we've noted time and again, the space for grey or the place we meet for conversation somewhere in between is getting smaller and smaller. We forget about the weeds that heal us or the wheat that harms some of us.

Yet this parable calls us to acknowledge another way. To see that as followers of the Son of Man, we are not the ones making the decision about separating the harvest. We are not the angels in this parable.

Often, we find our actions reflective of the slaves in this story. Those who question this infiltrating seed and hope for a simple solution to separate it from the wheat we have identified as good. Yet the response of Jesus in the parable is a graphic eschatological picture. Or a graphic depiction of the final judgment.

We can still take this text seriously and not literally. The context of Matthew reminds us that this parable was written several decades after the time of Jesus in a cultural context that was working through some very serious conflict around what community membership meant. The use of such graphic language would have been used to grab the attention of the reader and, as Jesus says at the end, "Let anyone with Ears hear." The main themes of this text are truly focused on the internal community of the time. The gathering and separation they were experiencing. The judgment, preservation, and destruction of the very same community. All themes we can identify in our own time and context. Have we become the ones deciding weed from wheat, or have we recognized we were being told to wait?

Trusting God with what comes next. Allowing others and ourselves the grace to be human and realize that we are all weeds and wheat at different times in our lives. This is not a parable about only being the good seed. This is a story about who is actually doing the collecting and sorting, and at no point is that us, nor was it the people of Antioch.

This parable calls us to look beyond the binary of good and bad as we recognize that life, especially life in community, is so much more complex than that. To recognize that we as humans are much more complex.

We express varying degrees of constructive and destructive behaviors regularly. Just like the weeds, we are not simply one thing. We can be invasive, and we can be healing. Sometimes it is hard to recognize and be accountable for all sides of ourselves. In our modern times, these issues often manifest in the larger structures of our society.

When we only allow ourselves to operate in a world of binaries, we often miss the beautiful work of the Holy Spirit. I believe we are people of the Trinity for a reason. When we forget to leave a way for that third space for that other option, we miss the beautiful plant that can heal us that we were about to dig up and throw away or that amazing person we stopped talking to because we are just too different.

My grandma taught me a lot about life and people through our time in the garden.

She taught me that even beautiful pumpkins can be rotten on the inside, and the ugliest tomatoes can be the sweetest.

I'll never forget when we were talking about dandelions; she told me that not everyone knows they can help you, and sometimes people won't let you show them the good stuff on the inside before they decide you're a weed. Don't let it get you down. Be joyful like the dandelion and keep spreading those seeds of joy wherever you go.

In those simple lessons, my grandma taught me that there were good weeds and rotten pumpkins that then become fertile soil.

She would help me to see that, ultimately, the weed itself was neither good nor bad. It was all about how it was being used.

My prayer is that we may see all the ways in which we can bring the best of ourselves out into the world this week, ask God's grace for

the ways we will miss that mark, and allow room for the Holy Spirit in every moment in between Amen.