

Pentecost 7
July 23, 2017
Message: Pulling Weeds

In our story this (morning) Jesus brings us a controversial problem as old as the first Garden. The modern version of the problem questions that if God is good, why is there evil around us? Where did the evil come from? In the parable, the servants of the master of the house instinctively do what you and I still do today: they question the skill, the integrity, the goodness of the Master! *'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?'* Is that nothing short of accusing the Master of having acted poorly? Something is obviously wrong and the Master must be the one to blame! Is that any different than you and I when we begin to question and wonder, *'How can God be completely good?'* when we look around and see the horrors and chaos that occurs and that evil people bring upon others?

And like our first parents in the first garden, we believe that if we could just take matters into our own hands, things would certainly be better! It was the temptation of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that turned our father Adam: better to have God's knowledge and be a god than to trust in His knowledge and have a God! *'God, you've obviously fallen down on the job, so maybe we should take over here! Let us take care of the problem! Let us get rid of what we clearly see to be evil in the world! Let us go and gather up the weeds!'*

But, surprise, surprise; there are hidden problems that the servants had perhaps forgotten and of which you and I were not aware! Sometimes we can get a little more insight into the stories of Jesus if we know a little more about the common everyday things that he and his followers knew. Today's gospel lesson gives us a good example. Most of the translations we read tell us that the enemy came sowing *weeds* and that as the wheat came near to harvest, then the weeds also appeared. That clue along with the Greek word used in the text is important. The word was *zizania* and while it certainly meant *weed*, it meant a *specific weed* called darnel. The interesting thing about darnel is that clear up until the harvest time approaches, it is virtually impossible to distinguish it from wheat! How can you pull weeds if you can't tell the weed from the wheat? How can evil be eradicated if it cannot be recognized?

The first problem then is that, you and I cannot be sure to recognize all the evil that surrounds us. The blatant evil of twisted humanity is certainly recognizable; the immoral bulldozers of destruction wreaking havoc in the Garden of God's creation. But scripture also reminds us that it is also the

little foxes who ruin the vineyard! (Song of Songs 2:15) All is not as it may seem!

Second, the intricate interweaving of the tendrils of life in the Kingdom would certainly defy our clumsy attempts to fix things! Imagine doing brain surgery with a backhoe! Good and evil are inextricably bound up together in the fabric of life.

Third, everything serves the purposes of the Master. Even the weeds, gathered and bound, serve as fuel for the fire!

Finally, and perhaps most important, Jesus reminds us that the Master knows what He's doing! "This is not your job," he tells us. "I'll take care of it! At the end of the age, I'll gather out *all the causes of sin*! And not just those you want to readily acknowledge and eliminate, but *all* causes! Think about it!"

That leads us to the realization that this story of Jesus works on multiple levels. It works cosmically as we've just observed. But it also works on the personal level of the heart.

Over and against the seed of faith that the Son of Man planted in our hearts at baptism, there are also the weedy seeds of the enemy: the world, the devil, and our sinful self! Ironically, it is only as we become increasingly familiar with God's law – his expectations and demands – that we become aware of the insidious pervasiveness of our own evil.

If ridding the soil of our heart of those weeds could be accomplished by our own toil, what need would we have of the savior? When we try on our own to root out all the sin and brokenness from our own hearts, we quickly realize that the task is beyond comprehension, much less accomplishment! If we try through our own power and understanding to weed that field, we can cause ourselves nothing but destruction and despair!

But our compassionate Lord Jesus promises to do that work for us, too! He sends his angels, his messengers, bringing us his holy Word and Sacraments that not only causes the weeds of sin to appear in our lives, but removes them again and again as often as necessary until he calls us to his harvest at the end of the age. Then the righteousness that is ours in Christ Jesus will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. We have ears, let us hear!

Thanks be to God!