

Pentecost 9
Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43
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On Being Weeds and Wheat

When I was a child my sister and I used to spend several months each summer in Chicago with our grandparents and cousins. Part of the ritual of that experience was each Saturday when grandpa would push his hand mower and cut the grass. When it was really hot he pressed his grandsons into the task, and strictly oversaw how we did it. Afterwards, all the cut grass had to be raked and put away and then very carefully every inch surveyed to be sure any weeds or crab grass hadn't taken root. Grandpa's grass was soft like a quilt and a beautiful intense green.

When as an adult I was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, fresh out of seminary to undertake my first responsibilities as a pastor. I bought a house surrounded by tall live oak trees with lots of hanging Spanish moss. However, the lawn was entirely taken over by crab grass, which in the Midwest everyone would get rid of as a "weed." One afternoon I was busy pulling out the offensive long spidery roots of this unwanted weed when my neighbor walked across the street to see what I was doing. He informed me that what I was pulling up was not weeds but St. Augustine Grass and this is the kind of grass that grows all by itself here. So, the same thing went from being weed in the Midwest for my grandfather to the status of a named highly desirable grass in Jacksonville.

Last week the language of the Gospel was that of soil: good, rocky, or thin. I won't get into a discussion of the difference between the black rich soil of the Midwest versus the sandy soil of Florida, but the contrast is, of course, similar. What is considered good soil depends at great deal on where one is in comparison to everything else.

Today's Gospel uses the language of "weed" and "good seed." The interpretation of this parable put into the mouth of Jesus reinforces a dualistic division of the world characteristic of the literalists of early Christianity. This part of the text makes clear that one is either entirely weed or good seed and that those who are weeds are doomed to eternal hell fire because they are products of the devil.

I'm sure in conservative congregations where this Gospel is being preached today there are preachers, no doubt, who cannot resist the temptation to point out that gays and lesbians and other sexual deviants are weeds sown by the devil destined to be destroyed in everlasting hellfire. Some like Jerry Falwell, will add abortionists and feminists to that list. It is, of course, tempting to ask which 'weed' is calling which 'seed' 'weed,' but I will refrain myself and you may think what you would like. That temptation is in itself a sign of the problem of dealing with a dualist model.

Dualism divides the world by requiring a "them" versus an "us". "Them" are the embodiment of everything that is 'evil' and "us" is the embodiment of all that is virtue

and goodness and godliness.

Dualism is essential to all fundamentalist and literalistic religions and to their formation of the political, social and economic worldview they present. Consider how the three major literalistic religions are locked into conflict in just one way. Jewish fundamentalists claim God gave the Jews the land of Israel (the 'us') and therefore they have a right to any land they want, regardless of Palestinians living there a thousand years or whatever (their 'them'). They are out to rebuild the Kingdom of David for the Messiah. Christian fundamentalists (the 'us') support Israel because they believe that when the Jews reoccupy the holy land Jesus will return on the clouds so this evil world (of 'them') can end. Muslim fundamentalists, (an 'us') on the other hand, support the uprising of the Palestinians against the Israelis, and attack the United States because Christian fundamentalists in America (the 'them') support the expansion of Israel in order to hasten the coming of the Rapture and the final battle between Good and Evil on the plain outside Jerusalem called Armageddon. Meanwhile, the rest of the world is pulled into this conflict with its violence against babies, children, the elderly, women, and men.

The point I am making is that at their core, all fundamentalists and religious literalists are the same. They believe they alone are the "good" with a total lockout on truth and righteousness and God and everyone else is "evil." Some, of course, those of us who are sexual deviants, are more evil than others. All believe in vengeance, all believe killing is justified in the pursuit of the good, all are intolerant of anything that even hints of pluralism, diversity, tolerance, social equality, secularism, and modernity.

We recognize from history this "them as weeds" embodying the fullness of evil and "us" as the embodiment of good has been used to justify the most horrible of things human beings do to each other. That is because 'evil' is never done in the name of 'evil' but always masks as Good, as ultimate Good. Hitler with his "us" being the super pure Aryan race and "them" everyone else, with a special "them as weeds" for those requiring extermination, Jews, German male homosexuals, gypsies, and the other undesirables unworthy of life. The guards in the camps wore the words, "God is with us" on their uniforms and the genocide justified because these people were 'evil' and a threat to the stability and purity of the Aryan Race.

In our own country the category of "them as weeds" justified the slavery of the Africans, the genocide of native peoples whose land was taken from them, the oppression of the Chinese imported to build the railroads, the internment of the Japanese during the second world war, and the condition of the immigrant farm workers whose sweaty labor puts cheap veggies in Safeways and Albersons.

I don't know about you, but last week when Phyllis was preaching about soil, and God's intention that we be good soil in the sense of nurturing and producing life, I was thinking I'm every kind of soil: I'm good soil, I'm real rocky soil, and I'm certainly very thin in places. Part of my journey through life has been accepting that I'm just soil, rich and

rocky and sandy altogether. Hopefully as I've gotten older, I try to make sure I don't throw my rocks at anyone else and do them deliberate harm. I need to be responsible for my own rocks and keep them from flying through the air.

The radical idea of the Incarnation, however we understand it, is that dualisms are not ultimates, but merely opposite polarities, the appearance of differences which are intended to be brought together in an all encompassing unity. The model of the Incarnation is the joining of the divine and human, the male and the female, the physical and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal in Jesus. All is One.

This is, in fact, the great discovery of modern physics in the past century as physicists probed the atom and the discipline of Quantum Physics came into existence. Their great revolutionary breakthrough was the discovery that the phenomena of light is the combination of wave and particle, two things that are opposites, contraries, and cannot logically or conceptually co-exist together, but when they are in relationship, they produce light. Opposites make light. Now there is a stunning idea to revolutionize the world. The Quantum world is a world in which in spite of all apparent contradictions, everything is One interrelated, interactive, interdependent whole, and that model may well serve as a model of wholeness for you and me, and give us a different take on today's weeds and seeds Gospel.

So, if we approach this text not from the perspective of dualism but collapse it, perhaps we discover a deep truth about ourselves, we have both "good" and "evil," weed and wheat within us. The challenge in life is how do we live with this. We only get in trouble if we only see "evil" only in others and not within ourselves. We get into trouble when we see ourselves as "good" and others as "evil." We get into trouble when we believe we alone are right and we alone possess the truth and the problems are caused by everyone else.

Over against all of this, we must find our way. Today, a great majority of our members are walking through the park to raised money for the SF Aids Foundation ongoing work to advance the science against this disease which in the world has reached staggering proportions, and advance the care of those living with it. The organization of Aidswalk is

an answer against those of us who are labeled "evil weeds" to be pulled out and destroyed by the religious and righteous.

We need to tend to each other. We who are someone's discards, rejects and disposables, someone's "evil weeds" We need to be careful lest we somehow have a category of those who are "them as weeds" to us. Jesus list of the hungry, homeless, diseased, and imprisoned is a good beginning place. Solidarity has always been a powerful tool to unite.

Following the Incarnation we seek to discover the oneness of all things and all people, and above all to discover the oneness of our own internal opposites. We seek to awaken ourselves to love, love of ourselves, love of each other, love of all who are different, love

even of our enemies and certainly love for this world and its beauty. Remember that the Greek word that in the translations we commonly use as ‘resurrection’ also means “awaken.”

Before the earliest Christians viewed the crucifixion as the death of Jesus dying as a vicarious act of assuming punishment for human sins by a righteous God demanding justice, the cross was a symbol of wholeness with the vertical branch representing the connection between heaven and earth and the horizontal branch representing the connection between all earthly polarities, such as masculine and feminine. The figure of the Crucified on the cross represented what we today we call the Ego, or that which thinks it is who we are. Only with its ‘death’ can the True Self, represented by Jesus, awaken and come to fullness of life, wholeness of being.

Today, if we are to take the symbolism of the cross as a connection to wholeness, we can claim our own wholeness, weeds and all, good and rocky soil and all, even that which is named “evil” in our lives. We do this because we are embraced by unconditional love so we can live through unconditional love, in unconditional love, for unconditional love. No longer in the illusion of our separateness, nor the illusion that we are an “us” versus “them,” whoever that is, instead we are joined to the web of life, connected to everyone, even our enemies, and to everything that is. Each of us is part of the Oneness of the All. Everyone belongs. Everyone has a place. Everyone is invited and welcomed. Come, let us participate in what our earliest predecessors called, “the Love Feast.” You have a place. You belong. Here and now. Nothing required or demanded. Just eat it and drink it.

The great poet and Sufi mystic, Rumi, writes of God as the Beloved saying, “I am a lover of the universal and the universal lover. I am you in love with yourself.” Amen.