

July 19, 2020 - The Bearded Darnel Based on Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Prayer:

Last week our focus was on us being cultivators of seed planted in our midst. Through our actions we reflected on how we might encourage growth in body, mind and spirit of those around us. We reflected on how we might nurture and sustain love as a gardener would nurture and sustain planted seed. Matthew's message was that we, God's Gardeners, could make a vital difference in whether or not seeds of life might flourish or perish.

In today's gospel Matthew accounts for those times that, regardless of our efforts, weeds grow among the plants. And in some cases the weeds are so thick and intertwined with the desired plants, one cannot remove them for fear of taking everything away.

I learned that lesson this spring when trying to separate some intertwined grass from a bunch of lavender on the slope behind our townhouse. By the time I was finished I had but a few sprigs of lavender in my hand. Most of what I planted didn't thrive.

Jesus says the sowers of bad seed are "the children of the evil one," and they do this intentionally. Unlike the previous gospel, this is not happenstance, it is a purposeful act, "the enemy" "**deliberately sows cheat wheat in a field of good wheat.**"ⁱ What's worse, sometimes, as in this case, the weeds are noxious. In this gospel account the weeds are a reference to "false wheat" or the **Bearded Darnel**, a plant with toxic qualities that looks much like regular wheat making the task of weeding that much more difficult.

In this story, Jesus says, there are those that would purposefully sow weeds in our lives that would upset our hopes and dreams. There are those that would stand in our way of helping us cultivate and nurture one another. There are those that would purposely plant unwanted crops to thwart our good efforts.

If one reads the news headlines any given day you could cite any number of examples. Noteworthy are international leaders and individuals with influence that would have us discredit someone or something for their own benefit. And there are many who would deflect the negative away from themselves by false accusations or scapegoating others. We know as well that failure to deal with evil allows it to spread (like a noxious weed) multiplying and infesting the human condition.

And, like the noxious Bearded Darnel, evil things come in disguise! We can't wipe them out because we don't always recognize that they are there. Sometimes they become normalized and we become accustomed to their look and perhaps even their outcomes. Putting weed killer on them all or pulling them all out would mean sacrificing the good to get at the bad (evil). This presents quite a dilemma, if we don't try to separate the evil from the good, the Bearded Darnel from the Good Wheat, it will continue to proliferate, continue to cause harm, malaise, hardship and destruction.

As I read and reread this gospel message, I'm looking for a solution. What is the takeaway from Matthew's message this week? There must be one. What can I do, what can we do in our faith journey to prevent the choking weeds from taking over our beautiful gardens, the gardens that provide the blessings in life? Do we just leave things alone and let divine intervention take care of things at "the end of the age" as Shirley Mae read? Matthew suggests that the "evildoers" will reap what they sow being cast into a fiery furnace where there will be **"weeping and gnashing of teeth."** When the crop is harvested, the toxic weeds can and will be separated from the crop.

If we do nothing for fear of taking out the good with the bad it seems to me an attitude of complacency. It seems irresponsible to ignore actions of individuals acting in caustic ways in our societies, people that would plant fear, hopelessness, mistrust, and hatred. Somehow leaving God to deal with **"all causes of sin and all evildoers"** doesn't sit well with me, especially when we ourselves are God's hands, feet and heart in the world. And if we follow the path of Jesus, would he not expect more of us?

I think Matthew's message is really a message of hope, hope that even in a planted crop overgrown with noxious weeds, even in a threatened harvest, something good will prevail. Matthew suggests that at harvest time the good healthy plants will be separated from the bad, the latter cast away. To a farmer looking out on a threatened crop that must be hopeful news. To us looking out on a threatened creation and a humanity in crisis, the same can be said.

Looking out on the world stage is like looking at a crop threatened with extinction. Despite vigilant efforts of environmentalists, our planet and all that call it home are more at risk with each passing day. Too often there is a virtual blindness to the plight of "the other;" the individual living in a tent in the local park, the next person who perishes from a fentanyl overdose, the person who must use the food bank. Surely, we just can't say, "leave this to the end of the age" hoping that God will sort it all out. "Ignore this and the evil that has planted its roots in society that has caused so much demise will eventually be cast out. The Bearded Darnel will be cast aside and burned."

There are those things that we can't change, situations we cannot influence. Some problems are larger than we can individually cope with. That is a certainty and it has been the case for millennia. It will continue to be the case for the rest of our lifetimes and many lifetimes after us. We hope and pray that there is a shift from selfishness, impatience, intolerance and consumerism that is preventing God from being as gracious and loving as God can be. Perhaps there will be a realization that **"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."** We hope so, we pray so, but we are uncertain.

What can I do? I could I suppose take up one of those jobs at the international airport in their Agriculture Department. The agents there check bags and parcels daily for foreign noxious plants and seeds coming into our country. They are careful to confiscate anything that might threaten the health and vitality of our existing plants, vegetables and fruits. It might be fun walking about with a sniffer dog alert to the odour from a contraband Kiwi or Banana.

I could get a job at one of those inspection stations where they check for invasive mussels or plants that threaten our aquatic environment. Inspection of boats in summer sounds like a lot of fun.

I could, you could too if you wanted too. But I don't think we need to seek out something the average Peachlander can't do. Perhaps we can simply keep at it, looking for ways to make it known that even though we can't pluck out all the noxious weeds in any planting we can do much.

(Pic 2) I think I will dig up some more of the lavender plants out back and as best I can pull out all the weeds that are choking their survival. I hope some will survive in new plantings. I will do my part. "Look our Bearded Darnel, here I come!"

Oh and I should add, while most of the lavender perished after my transplanting, some did take root and now has a new beginning. (Pic 3)

Thanks for listening this morning.

Amen

ⁱ Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3, Westminster John Knox Press, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, 2011, p 260