

Loving the Wheat, and the Weeds

Based on Matthew 13: 24-30

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

July 23, 2023

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

For those of you in the sanctuary, I invite you to look at the insert with two images on it. On one side is "Jacob's Ladder", a remarkable painting by the artist Marc Chagall. The other is a photo I took last week at the home of my father-in-law, the field that soon will be harvested by a neighbour.

I have heard the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Sunday School and worship countless times from my childhood, but, until now, I had never thought about the logistics that would be involved. The logistics I'm wondering about revolve around the absurd suggestion that a farmer might try to weed his field of wheat; pulling out the weeds manually.

Now, we smaller scale gardeners are told to weed our gardens. It is again confession time: our flower bed doesn't get weeded very much, nor does our little vegetable garden. In fact, I kind of like weeds. Those yellow flowers, dandelions, I think they are rather pretty. But I watch with amazement when neighbours bend over and manually extract those tenacious dandelions from their lawns.

Scientists tell us that we can help our bee neighbours by leaving patches of weeds and wildflowers for them to do their magic. Jesus tells his followers in that parable to leave the weeds in the fields, until harvest time. "Don't go manually weeding the field," he says. "Imagine," he continues, "if you try to pull the weeds out but end up pulling out the good grain."

So, I wonder: If there are weedy people in yours or my life, should we likewise leave them be, and let God do the judging? One more modern progressive Bible scholar wonders if maybe this is not only a teaching of Jesus about good and bad people, but perhaps the "field" is our spiritual life, and the process of gleaning the wheat from the chaff in our lives is the holy work we do with our Creator.

Parables, by definition, are to be left open-ended, even though Gospel writers like Matthew present Jesus as explaining what "wheat" and "weeds" represent. Some scholars suggest that this explanation was likely added later by story tellers after Jesus was gone, and that Jesus most likely left followers to figure out its meaning for our lives.

I'm rather uncomfortable with imagining an "enemy" planting weeds among the wheat part. You know what I mean? But, Jesus says, don't worry about those weeds until harvest. Wheat in our lives, and weeds. Are we called to love them both?

I'm probably a little bit of a pushover, I tend not to distinguish bad people from good people. My partner, a teacher, cannot afford to be blind to the misbehaving kids, letting them run amuck. Leave the weedy behaviours and a teacher may have pint sized coup d'état in the classroom. Morally speaking, for the rest of us, Jesus seems to be saying, "Leave the judgment to God."

Think about that for a moment, the implications of that statement. Yes, the alarm bells might be going off about a person in your life. That person who seems a little too smooth, or too nice, or they avoid eye contact. Jesus highest principle of loving everyone unconditionally suggests to me that we not just tolerate weedy people, but love them.

I am a hypocrite. I talk about love and how the face of Christ is seen in everyone, including people downtown, the street-smart folks, the people who are obviously burdened by life, carrying mental health issues, lack of stable housing. When I take the time to just go for a walk, perhaps I say hello to a stranger. Honestly, I bury my wallet deep in my pocket. I'm comfortable, I'm privileged in so many ways – male, somewhat confident, calm in situations that others might feel fear in.

But then my children want to come downtown with me. Walking along, my laser scanning eyes sweeping the streets, and we come upon a person sitting on the street. My kids want to talk with the person, and the silent alarm in my head screams a warning. My kids just want to care for a neighbour. What about me?

It is hypocrisy, me preaching about the face of Christ in absolutely everyone I meet, but then this fear that still lurks.

Then there are the profoundly problematic people in my world, like Paul Bernardo. Do I think he deserves to have a little less security. No, if I'm honest, I don't. But, I have witnessed a couple of Federal Parole Hearings, and I know that the prison system discerns very carefully some inmates, particularly high profile offenders. Without a doubt, I can say to you that I'm thankful to live in Canada where we as a society truly strive to offer people an opportunity to reform, to become better people, even those who commit heinous crimes.

Still, we all must hold the families who continue to grieve the horrible way that Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy were taken from them – I think that it was wrong for the federal authorities not to give the victims' families an opportunity to offer their opinion.

Can I surmise how God views criminals, or egomaniacal politicians, or people who abuse their authority, or that woman who might be in front of me at the buffet table who takes the last two chicken wings? I may have an idea what God thinks, though that lens of love. But my obligation, as a follower of Jesus, is to love that woman – really difficult when I'm feeling hungry!

Remember the parable opening, as Jesus does in a series of parables, saying: "The kin-dom of God is like..." This is about the Creator's vision, not ours. We are part of it all. Perhaps at some moments we are like the weeds in God's Dream, God's Vision. Other times, we are the wheat. The bigger picture we are called to imagine, how, not as slaves in a field, but as friends of Jesus, as beloved children of God, we can nurture a healthy garden, or field, whatever place in the field of life we are. We are called to love, not judge, the weeds. Love them. Love them. Amen