

Weeding Made Simple

Pentecost 11 – 17th July 2011

Readings:

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Have you ever been blamed for something you didn't do? How did it feel - not good? The sense of injustice, the feeling of anger, sometimes even the thought - well if that's what they think of me - I might as well live down to their expectations of me. It's all fertile ground for planting seeds of self doubt and in extreme cases self destruction.

I'll be surprised if we don't all share memories such as these. I remember in Year 9 at High School I belonged to a class that had gained the reputation as being the worse "A" class in the school's history. We had one student, McDonald, who had a decided talent for art. His only problem was that he liked to etch his talent upon the school desks. Great gouged masterpieces!

Well one day the Deputy Head, as they are often want to do, went off his head. He showed us the offending desk and demanded to know who was responsible. Well how were we to know - in fact most of us didn't.

But that didn't stop our deputy from devising a punishment for the whole class that involved us spending Wednesday afternoon - sports afternoon - in the classroom, sanding down all the desks in our room and revarnishing them.

I still recall the feeling of injustice I felt. In later years I wondered if our Deputy Head had not read some of Lenin's work - especially the bit where Lenin reckons that it's better to execute a hundred innocent persons than have one guilty go free!

There appears to be a strong urge in human beings to root out those people who we categorise as being not quite up to our own standards, to separate the goats from the sheep, the weeds from the wheat. And if that causes a little collateral damage along the way - if it means that innocent bystanders get hurt - it's a small enough price to pay for ensuring that our society remains pure and undefiled by wrongdoers.

Take the ongoing discussion on asylum seekers - coming to Australia. We brand them all as illegals. Even though, if they had arrived in a European country or the US, they would be allowed to stay whilst care was taken to establish their bona fides.

In Nigeria where they do not have the luxury of being an island continent, they are building another huge refugee camp to house the tens of thousands of fleeing asylum seekers. No Pacific or even Malaysian solution for them. But we feel this need to weed out unwanted immigrants to protect our country. Both major political parties and the tabloid media urge us on in this weeding task, and so innocents suffer.

But then there's Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds. The wheat, the innocent, is thought to be so precious, so important that Jesus says leave the weeds, let them grow. God

will bring in the harvest. And of course one good reason for letting the wheat and the weeds grow up alongside each other is that we can never tell which is which. Some weeds survive because they mimic the plants they grow amongst. Some weeds are so enmeshed that it is impossible to untangle them without doing serious collateral damage to the valuable crop. So Jesus says let them be. God will bring in the harvest.

Jesus tells us that he doesn't want zealots or vigilantes, running around destroying the weeds. Such behaviour often turns us ourselves into weeds.

So sure of ourselves are we that we think we become the farmer instead of the hired hands. Think of the atrocities done in the name of the church because some decided to go on weeding expeditions. Disciples burning in an attempt to become holy.

And another way to look at this parable - and remember that's what it is - is to recognise that within each of us there grows a field of wheat and weeds. We live with that curious mixture all our lives. God the farmer looks into our hearts and sees what grows there. That's what our psalm was saying.

God loves the good in us, the God part in us, in all of us, so much so that God is willing to live with the imperfections, the weeds that are in all of us. That's the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our community, our nation, our world, is made up of the same curious mixture. Wheat and weeds. The gospel calls us to live in that ambiguous state, living lives that are dedicated to God and his gospel. Living in such a way that the society around might come to value the way of Christ and be transformed from weeds to wheat. Jesus in this parable is saying leave the judging up to God.

But if we decide that we will become the judge - we are in danger of ripping up the good with the bad, a thing that has happened quite often in the history of the church, where puritanical correctness has served to destroy everyone involved, even the people who sought to do the weeding.

I believe that Jesus is saying here that there is always a possibility of changing people and a risk of being changed ourselves when we live alongside others, and this is the life to which we Christians are called. Changing people, not by judging and condemning them prematurely, but by living alongside them. In the end we will all be known by the fruit we bear and it'll be God that'll be doing the judging. And in the main I believe God to be a fairer and more compassionate judge than we ourselves, for God does not jump to ill-informed conclusions like we are wont to. God looks to the heart and knows us better than we know ourselves.

We are called to love not judge, for frail humans that we are we often can't distinguish the wheat from the weeds. So let's just love.

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