

Are You Growing Grass or Standing in the Weeds? 10 Pentecost A

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed” – Matthew 13:24

At our house we have given up on the weeds in our yard and decided to let someone else see if they can do better. I would prefer to just let them grow and accept the fact that the world needs weeds more than grass. But then there is keeping up with the nice lawns around us and we certainly don't want to infect their yards. If we were in Arizona we would be talking about cactus.

To have nice looking grass there has to be good seed. There are a variety of seed for different needs: shade, direct sun, the hardy Bermuda grass, to name a few. However, none of these grass seeds kill weeds. We're waiting for one of you to invent that one.

It may seem that weeds come along while we are asleep. They grow overnight. The weeds often look like grass and it's hard to tell the difference. In Jesus day there was a weed called “bearded darnel” that was poisonous and looked just like wheat. These weeds could not be pulled out until the ears of the wheat kernels began to show. Patiently one must wait until both mature to tell the difference.

Planting, growing and waiting are metaphors of the spiritual life. The scriptures imply that this process is similar to being in a state of hope. Like a healthy lawn, like a harvest of wheat, hope takes a while. Sean, who runs his own lawn service has been by our house at least four times this year putting down weed killer, then nutrients, then some other treatments I have no name for. He is coming back in the Fall to perforate the ground for next Spring as well.

Minneapolis pastor Leith Anderson tells of calling ChemLawn to take care of his suburban weed-infested lawn, only to have them reject his lawn as a client because it was so bad. One member of his church volunteered to totally remove his old lawn and start a new one, an offer he was almost ready to accept when a former farmer gave him some advice: Don't worry so much about getting rid of the weeds. Just grow the grass, and the grass will take care of the weeds.

The Andersons took his prescription and did all they could to grow "the good stuff." After a couple of years, the lawn looked just as good as everyone else's (Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992], 125-26).

The Andersons had to ask themselves what would be their primary focus - growing grass or killing weeds? Like the householder from this week's Gospel parable, the Andersons decided to concentrate on the positive - on growth - instead of pouring their time, energy and resources into killing off weeds.

Taking this tack not only concentrates our energies on the positive, it safeguards us from bad judgment calls. Sometimes what we would quickly suppose to be weeds turns out to be unexpected flowers in our midst. Jesus' parable intentionally takes responsibility for "reaping," for gathering and bundling together true weeds out of human hands and makes this a task for divinely directed angels. Differentiating between weeds and beneficial plants is not a human responsibility. Thank God, for big favors.

Clearly, the kingdom of God is long-suffering and patient. It adopts similar strategy to that of farmers – wait to reap the good seed at the right time or harm may come to crops if you pull the weeds too soon. The kingdom's strategy in harvesting the children of God by waiting is similar: when the good ones mature one can tell the difference. The weeds are gathered and burned first then the wheat goes into the barn. Besides, evil can change in the hands of God. If we believe that God's love is irresistible there is hope that evil might see the truth and be saved.

Just a couple of months ago, our son Nathaniel was returning from dinner with a friend. After their farewell he went on his way to his student house near State Street, in Madison where he was mugged by three guys. Sometimes these parables get personal. If it was your child you would describe similar feelings to what I had. Robyn and I felt helpless and wanted to do something to support Nathan. I wanted to hurt those three guys – and not by myself. I wanted to buy a knife for his protection. The police advised that the only legal protection was to buy pepper spray. We did that.

My immediate anger and frustration was to lash out. Then I read this parable and I realize that just maybe those weeds may get pulled out someday or maybe some good seed may fall into their lives and they might become righteous men. Some enemy sowed weeds into their lives. For me that does not take away the duty we have to defend ourselves and our families against such attacks. I can still be angry. I was angry even while writing this message. I go back to the Wisdom of Solomon in our first reading: "There is no god besides you, whose care is for all people, to whom you should prove

that you have not judged unjustly; for your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all” (Wisdom of Solomon 12:13). Hmm...my cheek is starting to turn, but my hand is still ready to strike.

Torture, rape, and other unspeakable crimes against humanity make me angry as well. I recently watched the movie, “Amistad,” and those feelings come back again, as forty plus slaves survive a horrific true story to overcome cruelty and genocide. The cries of Cinque, their leader, can be heard again, “Give us free!” Again the Wisdom of Solomon speaks, “Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins” (Wisdom of Solomon 12:19).

The letter to the Romans says there is a chorus of groaning going on when the world and its people are being suffocated by the weeds. They could be growing grass instead. It is tiring when the weeds seem to be winning. St. Paul understood this desire to want to leave this life and be with God, where the grass is greener. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.” (Romans 8:22-24).

We are all waiting for those ears of wheat to show themselves. The harvest seems far away. For those of us trying to grow grass, it gets very frustrating when it seems we spend more time pulling weeds. They spring up faster than you can see them as they hide in the midst of the grass. God knows there is a harvest coming but for now we must pray, we must tend the field and wait. The kingdom of God is here and growing though it is hard to see it through the weeds.

Let us pray: Father, send laborers into the field for the harvest is bulging and there are so many who are hungry. Help us to be gentle but firm with those weeds that need pulling. Lead us to discern the right seed, the right soil, the best time to plant, the right amount of water that our grass might grow. And may all that see the fruit of our labor see your hand at work and come to you and embrace you and make you God and Savior of their lives. Amen.