

The 7th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: July 23, 2017

Proper 11: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43: *Down in the Weeds*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once again in Matthew's parable of the sower, Jesus says to us straight up.

"Let anyone with ears, listen!" A sower sows good seed in a field, but an enemy comes and sows weeds. Jesus explains that the good seed stands for the people of the Kingdom of God and the weeds stand for all who do evil. So, my sisters and brothers in Christ, what about the weeds?

Every gardener knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds. If you don't, the weeds will choke out the good plants you want to grow. God also knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds. Many of us are uncomfortable with the idea of a God of Judgment, but sooner or later we have to answer the question: What about the weeds?

There is a huge sign at Dachau, the Nazi death camp, which proclaims in French, German, Russian and English: “Never again!” That is the purpose of the exhibit, to remind us of the terrible deeds that were done at Dachau so that we keep thundering in every generation, “Never Again! Never Again!” Human evil is a continuing reality in our world. We see it everywhere. We recoil at the idea of the judgment of God, but what about the weeds? What about the evil within the hearts of men and women, the hatred, the bigotry, the envy, the bitterness, the lust, the anger, the unbridled greed, etc.

A high school class was asked to write an essay on Evolution. One student wrote the following, “According to the Theory of Evolution man descended from the apes and has been descending ever since.” There is some truth in that little piece of humor. In our appetite for evil, human beings are still descending. Apes are not capable of the extraordinary evil to which humans will resort. So, what about the weeds?

My brothers and sisters in Christ, our concern today is not about the final judgment that Jesus describes when the wheat and the weeds will be separated. For most of us that matter has already been settled. By faith we know that Jesus has accomplished our salvation through his death and

resurrection. We will leave judgment to God. That is way above our pay grade. As Pope Francis said, “who am I to judge?”

So, what about the weeds in our own lives? How do we deal with those weeds, those pesky personality defects, those murky moral slips, those tawdry times of ethical failure that keep us from being all that God intends for us to be? You see, God has created us to be like a beautiful garden bearing fruit whose taste is sweet and pleasing to the taste buds and bursting forth in blossoms whose beauty is pleasing to the eye.

My brothers and sisters in Christ our parable challenges us with a question, how do we get rid of the weeds from our own hearts and become the beautiful garden Christ intends us to be? The first step is to recognize how weeds grow. They grow without any effort on our part. No one goes out and plants a weed. No one cultivates it, waters it, and sees that it gets enough sunshine. Weeds require no labor. They just appear. Weeds remind me of that mindless bit of 1960s philosophy still so popular in our society today: “If it feels good, do it.” That is a certain recipe for failure. If we did only what felt good to us we would be physical, mental, moral and spiritual wrecks. The things worth having in life require effort, and sometimes, pain. One of the most dangerous heresies of this sort is the idea that love is something that comes naturally. In

this view of life, love is a mushy feeling. Mature people, however, understand that love is not simply a feeling; it is a commitment. Real love takes work. It involves the willingness to be there in good times or bad, for better or for worse. That's especially true of parenting.

Once there was a man who wouldn't let his children attend church. His rationale? He wanted them to wait until they were old enough to decide for themselves. His priest came by one day and said he wanted to take the man to his own home to see his garden. When they walked into the garden, it was full of weeds, which were choking out his squash, beans and okra. The man said: "This is a pitiful excuse for a garden!" To which the priest replied: "I just wanted to wait until the vegetables had a chance to decide for themselves what they wanted to do!" Looking after a garden takes work. So does looking after a marriage or being a responsible parent. Just let it go and the vegetable garden will die choked to death by neglect. So, what about the weeds?

Quite frankly my sisters and brothers, I am very wary of anything in life that requires no commitment on our part, no effort, no hard work, no inconvenience. You are probably dealing with a weed. The weeds say, relax. Take it easy, man. (PAUSE) That is the sinister danger, for example, behind gambling the illusion that great riches can be yours with little effort. It is also

part of the psychology of drugs and alcohol or any addiction. Why face your problems? You can escape from them with an artificial euphoria by simply taking a tiny pill or a drink. Having illicit sex can have the same appeal. A few hours in a motel room is a whole lot different than having to live with someone day in and day out. How do you get rid of the weeds? You begin by recognizing how weeds grow in your life. They grow without effort. We get rid of the weeds by recognizing what it takes to grow a beautiful garden. You begin with an idea of what you hope to achieve. You map it out in your mind's eye. You visualize the finished product, the geraniums, the roses, the hydrangeas, the begonias, the dogwoods and the maples, the hedges and the walkways.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, do you have that same clear-cut vision concerning your life? There are some people who take better care of their lawns than they do their lives. Successful people almost always have a vision of what they hope to achieve in life.

There is a great story told of a skinny, scrawny African-American kid who one day heard a coach say, "You can be what you make up your mind to be. God will help you." Later this youngster told the coach, "I've decided what I want to be. I want to be the fastest man in the world." The coach said, "Son,

that's a great dream but there is one problem. Dreams have a way of floating high in the sky and drifting around like clouds. A dream never becomes a reality unless you have the courage to build a ladder to your dream." He explained that his dream would take determination, dedication and discipline. Young Jesse Owens listened to the words of that coach and at the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany he established himself as the fastest man in the world. He won four gold medals and embarrassed Adolph Hitler before the whole world. A beautiful garden begins with a vision. A beautiful garden begins with a dream. A beautiful garden begins with an inner picture of what you can accomplish with God's help. A beautiful garden begins with a plan. A successful life requires that we give some thought to the future. We have a vision of the beautiful garden we hope to be. Now we sit down and make a plan. What would I have to do to make my dream a reality? Of course, my sisters and brothers, a meaningful plan for our lives will include all of eternity. So, what about the weeds?

A beautiful garden requires a vision, a plan and a commitment to cultivate it as long as necessary. I like what Tom Landry, the legendary football coach of the Dallas Cowboys who once said something like this: "I have a job to do that is not very complicated, but it is difficult: to get a group of men to do what they don't want to do so they can achieve the one thing they have wanted all of

their lives.” Isn’t that a great statement? Cultivating a garden requires those daily little tasks that are a pain. But you do them because you can envision the beauty and the bounty that awaits you. That, of course, is what disciplined living is all about. As a father of three children and a grandson, I believe children like discipline. They may not know it at the time, but with it they know exactly where they stand. The same is true in our relationship with God. So my sisters and brothers in Christ, isn’t it time you got rid of the weeds in your life? Weeds are the enemy of a beautiful garden, whether that garden is a good marriage, or the sanctity of your body, or your relationship with your children, or your progress in your job or profession, or in your relationship with God. Weeds require no effort, but they can ‘choke out’ the work of a lifetime. A beautiful garden, on the other hand, requires vision, planning, tending and discipline. But the prize is worth the price! So heed Jesus’ warnings about weeds. Keep the weeds out of your life.

A farmer was out spraying in his garden. A certain beetle was threatening his crops. His little girl was upset with her father killing all those helpless little bugs. Her father patiently explained that their family was dependent on their garden and the beetles could literally cause them to starve. “You see,” said her father, “I’m not so much opposed to beetles. It’s just that I am for our family’s garden.” That is God’s attitude toward weeds. It’s not so much that

God hates weeds. It's that God loves us so much that God does not want anything in our lives that might drag us down and take away our joy for living. Successful living, living an abundant life requires us to get rid of the weeds and to turn our lives into a beautiful garden and that is what the weeds are all about. AMEN.