

**Yr. A, Proper 11**  
**July 19, 2020**  
**Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**1469 Words**

**Lessons:     **Isaiah 44:6-8****  
****Psalm 86:11-17****  
****Romans 8:12-25****  
****Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43****

The Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ in today's Gospel applies to all the faithful, but it may be of particular interest to the children and youth who are assigned outdoor chores during these summer months. The good news is this: According to Jesus, you *never* have to pull weeds again! "Sorry, moms and dads. I'm just calling it like I see it."

We can *all see* just how shocking and maybe even frustrating this parable might be for those of us who want to eradicate the weeds in our yards...and the enemies in our lives. We want them gone—*forever*. We want them yanked out by the roots and destroyed.

We all have a problem with weeds—and the problem is this. There is no precise definition of a weed. The definition of a 'weed' is an *unwanted* plant. For a child, there is no more desirable plant than a dandelion. You can pick the stem, blow those little 'parachutes' into the breeze, and watch them land in the grass...*and* see your parents become unhinged before your very eyes.

I placed an artichoke plant in my garden for the first time this year. With long, jagged leaves, it looked like a noxious weed sprouting up between my tomato vines, but now I am enjoying the most delicate artichoke hearts, dipped in melted butter.

Two years ago, I took a shortcut when I was tired and not paying attention, pushing my lawn mower over some weeds intruding into a flower bed. I learned the unfortunate lesson that healthy strawberry plants don't come back if you chop them up with a mower.

Weeds are in the eye of the beholder, and our eyesight is not always very discerning. So Jesus says, "Just leave 'em alone for now. They're not your problem."

Although we are hearing this parable from the middle of Matthew's Gospel, it occurs near the beginning of Jesus' ministry with his new disciples. He is trying to explain the mysterious Kingdom of God to his followers, and how they fit within the wider picture of goodness and evil, intervention and pacifism, doubt and trust. They didn't get it right away, just like we don't get it...right away.

Jesus recognizes that there *is* an enemy of goodness. God knows this without our help, *and* God knows who the enemy is (and who the enemy's children are). We should take great comfort in our Lord's nonchalance about all this. It is a sign that God sees a clear difference between inconvenience and real danger.

You see, the enemy has no control, whatsoever, over the 'good seed'—the children of the kingdom. The enemy is only able to sow deception and confusion. Its servants like us who seem most concerned about the weeds. The Master knows that things are very much under control.

A second point worth noting about this parable is that God does not need our help. I want to quickly add that there are plenty of other parables that teach all the ways in which God *welcomes* our help, but Jesus never suggests that God needs our help. The Good News, of course, being that we worship a God who is not needy. I also want to add that *even this parable* does **not say** that resisting evil is *wrong*, only that it will not be as effective as God's final judgment about goodness and evil.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Robert Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) p. 87.

I think the crux of the problem is what I named earlier—our problem is the vagueness of how we define weeds as simply ‘unwanted.’ So, to the Third Reich, it meant 6 million Jews. To the Ottoman Government, it meant 1.5 million ethnic Armenians. To Stalin’s government, it was 7 million or more Ukranian peasants. To the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, it was 1.5 million of their opponents—political, military, journalists, students, doctors, and lawyers. To the government in Rwanda, it was a million Tutsi’s and moderate Hutus. To the ISIS regime, it was the Yazidi people and other ‘heretics’ of their fundamentalist theology. To white lynching mobs in America, it was blacks who needed to be kept in their subjugated place. And even to Anglican Christians, it was fellow Christians who were pushing too hard and too fast for reform within the 16<sup>th</sup> century Church.

Do you see our problem? The very broad category of ‘unwanted’ places millions and millions of people in danger of being eradicated. It also places millions and millions of people in danger of becoming eradicators, including Christian people like us. Nobody is safe on either side of the ‘unwanted’ judgment.

I am thankful for the insights of the Rev. Robert Capon about the parables of Jesus. Last year our Thursday Bible Study class—whom I desperately miss each week—(we) studied Capon’s 3-volume work on the parables, including this one.

Among other insights, we were blessed to learn how the early Church would have heard *this parable* during worship, retold in Ancient Greek. They would have heard the verb ‘aphete’—*leave* the weeds (alone), *permit* the weeds to be, *let go* of the weeds for now. And then the congregation would have prayed...the way our Savior Jesus Christ taught us to pray—‘aphes’ our debts as we ‘aphiomen’ *our debtors*.<sup>2</sup>

O God, please ‘leave alone’ all of our debts to You, as we promise to ‘leave alone’ all the debts other people owe us. Lord, please ‘let go’ of our trespasses against your Goodness, as we promise to ‘let go’ of the trespasses of others. Lord, forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

The real problem is that the weeds are just everywhere. And the ‘unwanted’ thoughts, words, and deeds in our own spiritual ‘back yards’ can be every bit as much of a problem as the unwanted thoughts, words, and deeds that we see in other peoples’ yards.

In order not to lose sight of the **greater** good—the *good seed*, the abundant harvest, the promising victory of God’s Goodness; we are going to have to **let go** of some of the unwanted stuff. We’re going to have to leave alone some of the sinful people we cannot fix. We’re going to have to forgive some debts we are owed, just like our debts have *already been* forgiven by God.

I wonder if Jesus may have bent down to the ground at this point in the parable and offered a visual depiction of the good news. “You can pick this...or you can pick this. You can end up with a handful of this...or a handful of this. You only have two hands. You only have so much time. Which one do you pick?!”

Please understand that this teaching is not an excuse to do nothing in the face of injustice. We can stop abuse and hold evil doers to account, without eradicating them. In other words, we can keep our baptismal vow to strive for justice and peace *with* God’s help.

We can also redress wrongs and work for restorative justice, without eradicating the wrong doers. In other words, we can adhere to our baptismal vow and persevere in *resisting* evil *with* God’s help. The good news of this parable is that we are not responsible for eradicating evil by ourselves...*without* God’s help.

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<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Robert Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) p. 90-91.

We can trust that God sees and knows and cares that Goodness will ultimately prosper and flourish *with God's help*. And we get to participate in the abundance of that harvest. "You only have two hands. You only have so much time. This is what we get to pick!"

Last week we heard the reassuring voice of the Lord through the (2<sup>nd</sup>) Song of the prophet, Isaiah. God said, "(Just) **as** the rain and snow fall from the heavens and water the earth, bringing forth life and giving growth; so is my word that goes forth from my mouth; it will not return to me empty; but it will accomplish what I have purposed and prosper in that for which I sent it."

In other words, followers of Jesus like us can relax a little bit about all the weeds. The love of God is in control, and nothing is as powerful or effective as that. We are *already* on the victorious side of Goodness. With our limited grasp and our limited time; we **get to** pick Goodness.

The good news of the Parable of the Weeds may be best summarized in the confident benediction from the proposed draft of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer: "Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Amen.