

St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

19th July 2020 – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER – WEEDS AND ALL

Although I know I am not as good or dedicated at it as many of you are, I must admit that I don't mind a bit of gardening. There is something about preparing the ground, putting in the seeds or the tiny little plants, watering and caring for them, and watching them grow. It is an enjoyable and a relaxing thing to do. And then it also brings great fulfilment when the plants actually do grow just as you intended them to; not always a given. But one thing I know that many people, but not all, hate about gardening is ... weeds. They spoil the look of the garden, and they take away the water and nutrients that we have given to our own selected plants. They are invaders, interlopers, and they need to be taken out as quickly as possible so that they don't interfere with our plan for our garden.

When we lived in Alice Springs, we were fortunate to have not only a large yard, but, because we lived on a large College property out of town, also extra land around us that we could use as we wished. At the front of our house we had a driveway that went across the front of our house and then curved around and met up with the small road which went to our neighbour's house next door, making a big traffic island. When we first moved there this island was filled with a grass that grows in small tufts and now covers central Australia, called buffell grass. I spent the best part of a year with a pick, taking out each one of these tufts of grass individually. Then I dug up the whole area, put in a dripper irrigation system, and planted lots of native trees and plants; desert rose, Spinifex grass, river red gum, round leaf mallee, desert pea, salt bush. I then added lots of rocks and logs, and we were getting lizards coming into it, birds coming down to the little waterhole I put in. I could sit on our front veranda in the late afternoon and watch my own little piece of nature. I was really proud of this garden, and to keep it looking just the way I wanted, every weekend I would get out my weed sprayer and walk around the garden spraying any little weeds that were just pushing up out of the ground.

Our neighbours, the College principal and his family, had to go past our house to get to theirs, and the principal's wife had a lot of experience with central Australian gardening. One day she said to me, 'Andrew, your garden is looking lovely, but do you know you have these lovely little wildflowers growing there. But, as soon as they start to grow a bit, they just seem to die off. I wonder why that is?' Well, obviously those wildflowers weren't immune to weed killer, but I didn't want to appear stupid and tell her that. What I did learn, though, was to not be so quick in killing off the 'weeds'. Instead, I let every plant grow until I was sure of what it was. And the result, as well as enjoying the plants I had put in, I also got to enjoy a lot of other, free growing, wildflowers also. I allowed the garden to move from my own little perfect construction, to being a part of God's creation.

The parable which Jesus tells today's in Gospel reading, the Parable of the Weeds, always makes me think about that particular gardening experience of mine. Unlike the Parable of the Sower which we looked at last week, where the seed was the Word of God, in this parable the seed is those who belong to God's kingdom. And the servants of the Sower, being good gardeners, want to pluck out the weeds as soon as they surface. What are they told? Leave them! 'You don't know which are the good plants and the bad, so leave them until the harvest'. To make the point even more, the 'weed' Jesus refers to here is one called the bearded darnel. This plant looks very much like a wheat plant until the grain is ready to come out. So, if the servants were allowed to take the weeds out of their master's crop, they would have certainly taken out a lot of the good plants also.

The good seed, the people of God's kingdom, come from God, and the weeds come from the devil. But the difference can't be readily seen. I wanted to have my garden perfect, like the servants in the story wanted their master's crop perfect. Like sometimes we might want to have 'our' church perfect. This parable is a warning against judging others, and about being aware that we ourselves don't fall into the category of the weeds. It is a very human thing for us to want to see our church as being like that perfect garden. Perhaps we see the 'weeds' as being those we think are not as good or as committed Christians as ourselves; they don't get involved or do things like we do. It's also very human to dismiss

as unimportant or wrong the views of anybody which don't fit in with our own. Sometimes the issues or people we might see as being 'weeds' might be open and upfront, like open disagreements between groups within a congregation or the whole church, things which can end up as being very damaging and public splits. Or it could be in the quiet and subtle ways we might try and exclude people, or make sure that their voice is not heard. It might be in how we hold a grudge with someone from our own congregation, someone with whom we share the Lord's Supper with each Sunday; continuing to bear that grudge instead of passing on the love and forgiveness which God always shows unconditionally to us. It might be the kind of welcome and acceptance we show to newcomers to our congregation. Are we wanting to cultivate that perfect garden, our way, or are we open to letting God work through us to bring people in? A question we should always be asking ourselves, both as individuals and a Christian community.

Not only is what Jesus talking about here, letting all come in, against how we might like to garden, but it also goes against much of our culture. Often to join a group, club, organisation, whatever, there is some kind of testing or evaluation done. Our gifts and talents might be checked out to see if they are of any use. Our earning potential might be evaluated to see if we can make a worthwhile financial contribution. We might have to give personal referees to see if we are going to fit in and not rock the boat too much. So called 'reality' TV shows, like Big Brother and Survivor, both feed off and reinforce our natural tendency to judge how we accept and wish to keep those who can contribute, and to throw out those not considered to be good contributors to the group.

But that's not how God's kingdom works. Jesus is telling us here that we are to welcome everyone in, because it's not we who make the judgement on who is in or out, but God. And He won't make that judgement now, but at the end time. And so, instead of looking at and worrying about others and their place in God's Kingdom, we need to look at ourselves. And Jesus gives a very strong warning here about that. He warns us that the devil is always at work, always sowing the seeds of mistrust and dissent, even among those who are a part of God's kingdom. One of the best things the devil can work

through is our pride. Like the servants in this parable, we can be so busy looking at others that we allow the devil to come in and take us away from God. And so, be open, be accepting. Stand up for what is right, but don't let people disagreeing with you become an excuse for cutting them out.

The big point of both last week's Parable of the Sower, and this week's Parable of the Weeds, is that it is always God's harvest. He makes sure it will happen, despite all the odds. And, it is He who will know, when the time is right, who is and who is not a part of His kingdom. And us, we are the workers. Our call is not to worry about the weeding, but about the scattering of the seed. Taking the message of God's love out wherever we can; by what we say as well as by what we do and the witness in our everyday lives we show to others. We can thank God that, because of Jesus, the weeds aren't taken out early; if that was the case none of us would be a part of it. It is God's harvest. We can thank Him that, through Jesus, He enables us to be a part of this; His family, His Church, His kingdom. And we can ask Him to help us to be faithful workers, planting not weeding, so that more and more people can come to know Him. Always accepting others, weeds and all, as a part of God's Kingdom. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION:

The Perfect Garden

- In what ways do you, like the servants in this story, sometimes see the church family as being like a perfect garden, needing the weeds to be removed so the wanted plants can grow as desired?
- If all the 'plants' in this crop were to be judged in the way that we sometimes judge others, where would that leave us?
- Why can we be certain that we will be a part of the final harvest?

Workers in the Harvest

- We are all called to be workers in God's harvest. How do we do that?
- Think about the ways you can:
 - Welcome others and accept them into our church family
 - Allow God to use you to plant the seed of faith in God's love in the hearts of others

*Pastor Andrew Koehler
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