

**Growing Together ~ July 17, 2011**  
**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Psalm 86:11-17**

This time of year, if we do any gardening, we certainly know about weeds and the harm they can do to the good plants. Weeds take away the nutrients needed to allow flowers and vegetables to grow strong and to produce good fruit. They soak up water intended to nourish the good plants and block the sunshine. They tend to crowd out the desirables in our gardens and often flourish.

I fight the battle of the Japanese Knotweed every year. I can almost keep ahead of them if I resolve to pull about 50 every day. The hostas I have planted keep many of them at bay, but they still persist and are the first thing to pop up. They are very healthy and strong and just plain big.

This struggle with weeds is not limited to this corner of the world. A friend of mine in Wisconsin posted on her Facebook page, “One more garden to weed, then we are off to Colorado.” She received many responses from around the country offering other gardens she might like to tend to. Most of us like to keep tidy gardens and hate the thought of the weeds taking over.

So, we come to his morning’s parable and wonder, “What’s up in the kingdom of God? Why are the weeds allowed to grow along with the wheat, until harvest, and then are uprooted and tossed into the fire? Does this parable speak of God’s patience and love for God’s creatures? Does it tell us that good and evil are allowed to grow together so that we can learn that, somehow, good will prevail in the end? Is good stronger than evil? Does this parable sing to us, as does that Christmas Carol, “The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, in peace on earth good will to man?” As always, the interpretation of this parable lies in the mind of the beholder as he or she works his or her way through the gardens of life.

We all know there is evil in the world. If we have any doubts about this all we need to do is watch the news or pick up a paper or go online. Evil abounds. We hear about the slaughter of the innocents from Florida to New York--horrendous murders of children that seem to take place with no rhyme or reason. We read of the devastating effect of wars that wipe out innocent people while opposing sides go after one another. Often we must wonder where God is in all of this. Why does evil keep marching on?

Well, it is grounded within us—we all have our weediness—we all have the capacity to choose whether we will be good or whether we will work evil against others. We might not literally murder someone else, but often we do not hesitate to slice and dice others with the words that come out of our mouths as we sit in judgment of our fellow humans. We engage in character assassination to try to make ourselves look better than other people. We never know who might be up to his kind of thing, we are so busy with our own lives. But, the weeds grow around us and within us even in our little corner of the world.

What can we do to weed out some of the nastiness we might find? What is it we can do to keep the weeds from overcoming everything we hold dear? First, we need to look deep within ourselves and see what is there. Often we do not see the harm we do. Or, we try to justify it by thinking that we are allowed to sit in harsh judgment of others because we are the good, valuable ones and they are not.

Our parable tells us that we are not the ones to sit in judgment. God is our final judge. That is a very good thing. Our task is to become the best humans possible without trying to undermine or weed out others. We are to become imitations of Christ, as imperfect as we are. We are never to stop trying even though the weeds grow right along with us. We are to remain good and wholesome grain no matter what we might think is being sent our way.

Do we think it is impossible to discover and pull out the weeds within ourselves? It isn't. We just need to allow ourselves some time and space for self-examination and decide that we are not all we think we are and then work to cultivate a better way of living and moving and having our being. We need to become people of integrity and patience and love. People who look for the best in others and who refuse to let those weeds within strangle out the goodness that grows right alongside it.

We are capable of doing this for we are God's beloved children and God has entrusted the world to us. We need only to choose the way we will live and to choose wisely. The choice is always ultimately ours.

*-- Amen*