

Thomas R. Cook  
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
8:00 and 10:00 p.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 23, 2017

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“Actually, Jesus is a Pretty Good Farmer”

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Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 7 Pentecost A (Proper 11)

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I hope Jesus is a better carpenter than he is a farmer. Really... just leave the weeds? That's his advice when the good crop is threatened? Just let it be? Look, I'm no pro in the garden, but even I know that weeds left unchecked can grow up to overwhelm a good crop, to choke out the good growth, steal the water and the soil, and possibly ruin the very things we hope to grow.

On the other hand... I suppose I am glad that Jesus really isn't a farmer, otherwise he may have advised his helpers to work quickly to root out the weeds in their midst long before it became clear what is the good plant and what is the bad. It's not always easy spotting the difference, you know. I learned that the hard way one spring when I deliberately attacked those tall gangly green stalks that were outgrowing a big patch of my fresh, new grass ---took the lawnmower and the weed-eater right to them and cut them down--- only to have Britton ask me why I had destroyed all her daisies. And I learned something that day, something about flowers, and something about a life of faith: I had to take care out there that I was giving enough time for things to grow in order that I could see for certain which things really

were weeds and which things were not. A little more time and concern and those tall, gangly green stalks that I mowed down would have sprouted beautiful white blossoms and become a natural gift to the beauty of the entire landscape. But, like those servants in today's parable, I was concerned to get out there and get those weeds gone, and in doing so, I destroyed some things that were of real value and beauty.

I'm glad that Jesus isn't really a farmer, and the Kingdom of Heaven isn't run entirely like the farms we know, or, by this time, some of us might already have been pulled up and cast away like a weed. We might not yet have had enough time to truly blossom, to be seen for the wheat we are to become rather than just the gangly stalk that is a weed in the field. But with patience and care, even the most gangly stalk among us might blossom into the richest grains of wheat. I'm glad that Jesus is a farmer willing to let things grow together long enough to learn the difference.

I mean, who is to say that what first appears in us as the stalks of stubbornness isn't in time maturing into the virtuous blossoms we call fortitude and perseverance? Or perhaps what first grows in us as the propensity to fib might, with time and nurture, mature into the blossoms of creativity and the fruits of imagination? Or even the tangled weeds of anger or indignation may, with time and nurture, be groomed into the healthy stalks of motivation and resolve, giving us the will and energy to work for good where we see suffering, injustice, and evil. As I see it, the bottom line in

this parable of the Kingdom of Heaven is that the good and the bad each have their place, and they have it long enough for their true fruits to be revealed, and when the time is ripe, that which is revealed as “wheat” is gathered in, and that which is revealed as “weed” is removed for good.

So it is as if Jesus is teaching us not to rush to judgment regarding the evil and the good. It may be that what at first appears useless or harmful becomes a thing of the greatest value. Jesus says that in the Kingdom of Heaven the wheat and the weeds are to be left to grow unhindered together... for a time. And we aren't to be too zealous to root out that which we think does not belong, since we might tear out what is good in our overbearing attempts to do away with what we consider to be evil. No, we are bound for a time to the fates that come with the intertwining of that which is good and that which is evil. A wise person once said:

*Don't let a restless [or judgmental] mind lead you to impulsive action.  
If you force events [even for the perceived good], you will fail.*

interpreted from Tao Te Ching, Chapter 64

But Jesus says there comes a time when justice is fully served, and that which is evil is indeed seen for what it is and is rooted out of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to us to decide when that time will be, nor is that judgment given to us as our work. Rather that work belongs with Christ who decides when and how good

will finally be served. In the meantime, we tend to the entire crop, that which may be wheat and that which may be weeds, for we are not the final judges in all things.

I once read that the Greek words for “allowing something to be” and for “forgiving” come from the same root. When we allow for the weeds to grow up within the wheat, that which may be evil to coexist with that which is good, we also allow for an opportunity for forgiveness. I’m not saying this is easy, but the Christian’s first response to evil may be not to eradicate, but rather first to forgive. When others treat us with disdain, with insult, immorality, misunderstanding and hurtfulness, maybe we aren’t to be so quick to decide they are evil and destroy them. Because I know we will need others to forgive us as well for the evil we can do.

So, I can’t know how each of you feels this day. Are you feeling more like a ripe stalk of wheat or is your life more like a tangle of weeds? Regardless, I encourage us all not to be too quick to judge even ourselves. We cannot know all that God is accomplishing through us. So let’s allow God to work through us. Jesus has sown the good seeds of the kingdom within us, and while it may feel that the weeds are simply taking over, there is growing time in this world yet. Jesus may be a strange farmer, but he is looking for us to mature into that ripe stalk of wheat we are meant to be.