Growing as Children of God

The 9th Sunday after Pentecost, July 17, 2005

Wisdom 12:13,16-19 Romans 8:18-25 Psalm 86 Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind,
and you have filled your children with good hope.
(Wisdom 12:16-19)

Driving in Seattle is very different from driving in Boston. There is no jaywalking, *never* any honking, almost no tailgating, and at a stop sign, everyone waits politely for someone else to move. No one takes a left turn in front of traffic as soon as the light turns green, and folks will queue up in the left-hand turn lane, never cutting in from the right.

So when Iza and I went to the Northwest Flower and Garden Show, at the Seattle Convention Center, we were shocked at people's behavior. Instead of the quiet, polite Seattle environment, here at the Garden Show, folks were elbowing one another aside, cutting in lines, stepping on toes. Unlike the gentle farmer Boaz, these folks were utterly Ruthless.

Here was the reason for the difference: These weren't ordinary Seattleites. These were gardeners. These were women and men who spent their free time pulling up weeds.

There is a certain grim satisfaction to weeding, a powerful righteousness in the garden. It is cathartic, bringing order to a flower bed or a border, destroying without mercy the undesirable plants. It is rewarding to see a garden looking full of color, life and pattern. It is comforting to rescue precious vegetables from noxious, invasive competitors. Yanking out the Japanese knotweed and the scrub oak saplings the milkweed and the ragwort, the vetch and the thistles. Most of these weeds aren't even given the honor of a burial in the compost pile! They are bound into bundles, as Jesus said, and burnt.

There is a certain grim satisfaction to weeding. You can hear it in the anxious, earnest voices of the landowner's servants: As soon as they saw the weeds spring up among the wheat, they want to run out and pull up those weeds –
even though they would destroy the wheat in the process uprooting the hope of harvest. But there is a tempting satisfaction to weeding.

And here is where the Church gets into trouble. Churches have taken the particular explanation inserted into Matthew's gospel, that the weeds are the Children of the Evil One. And churches have then counted human beings among the weeds.

At various times churches have declared whole groups of people to be hopeless weeds among the wheat. We have at various times declared that among the Children of the Evil One are Muslims, homosexuals, women, Africans, Jews, the mentally ill… And churches have gone out to pull those weeds, uprooting everyone in their path.

The damage of such self-righteous weeding can be truly destructive and painful.

So, are there weeds in the field, in the world? Of course there are. And, I believe that what chokes the good wheat are the powers and principalities, the institutions, idols, and wrong desires – individual and corporate – which lead to suffering and injustice and destruction. As we will sing in our closing hymn, "Mortal pride and earthly glory, sword and crown betray our trust"

And I believe that human beings *all* human beings can *only* be children of God, *never* children of Evil.

We know that by what we have done and by what we have left undone, we have failed to honor God, failed to honor ourselves, failed to honor one another.

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And we rejoice with the writer of the Book of Wisdom, from which we heard today,
that God has filled God's children with good hope, because God gives repentance for sins.

That is the faith we celebrate here at Messiah, every week as we gather around this altar. After we sing the Sanctus, I will tell the story again – the one great story – of how God formed us in God's image, calling us to dwell in God's infinite love. Of how we failed to honor God's image in one another and in ourselves; and of how God never ceased to care for us, and prepared the way of salvation for all people, in Jesus, God's eternal Word.

You might remember that last week I talked about saving the life of a weed – a little straggler, four inches high, which I protected from being uprooted. That weed turned into a giant Tree of Heaven, green branches spreading above house and street.

In Jesus' parable, the landowner *stops* his servants from going out and pulling up weeds – *stops* them from premature and ruthless judgment *stops* them from careless, merciless condemnation.

Perhaps this is what it means to be church – the whole Body of Christ gathered around the world. Not to condemn and uproot human beings, but patiently, patiently, patiently help one another to grow.

Grow in Glory. Grow to be the people God has created us to be. To celebrate around this table everything that makes us unique and wonderful. To celebrate around this table everything that we have in common with one another.

And patiently,
patiently,
lovingly

Grow as children of God.

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