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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pentecost 6

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ...crown vetch, the plant with the purplish white flowers, is forever growing in our patch of ivy at my home.

My wife and I clean out the ivy of all the crown vetch, and then a couple of weeks later the ivy is overgrown with the stuff once more.

And so we clean out the ivy again.

It is an ongoing battle, a battle that I feel we are never going to win.

Now, don't get wrong.

Crown vetch is a pretty enough plant, except when you don't want it in your ivy.

Then it becomes a nuisance. Then it becomes a weed.

PAUSE

That is the definition of a weed, isn't it?

A weed is a plant that is growing where you don't want it to grow.

To me, crown vetch is a weed because I don't want it in my ivy.

To someone else, crown vetch may be the very plant they do want to cultivate. Who knows?

So yes, a weed is a plant that is growing where you don't want it to grow.

And so things like crab grass, dandelion, clover, thistle, are all weeds.

They are plants that we don't want growing in our yards.

But to someone else, these plants might be anything but weeds.

Scotland's national flower is of all things thistle.

PAUSE

It is interesting that in today's gospel reading, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a field, in which grows both wheat and weeds.

The plant of choice for this field is wheat.

It is what the farmer (who is called the householder in the parable)...

It is what the farmer had sown in the field.

But there are also weeds growing in the field.

There are plants growing in the field that the farmer doesn't want growing there.

The kingdom of heaven is compared to a field where wheat and weeds grow together.

PAUSE

It is a pretty interesting analogy for life, isn't it—this field with wheat and weeds growing in it?

It is a pretty good understanding of the world in which we live.

There are "weeds" growing up within society that we just don't want to be there.

If we stop and think about it for a moment, we can name the "weeds" growing up within society.

In particular we can name the weeds that are growing as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

What are those “weeds”?

Unemployment and economic hardship.

Loneliness and depression.

Grief over the loss of a loved one.

Uncertainty about the future.

These are just a few of the weeds that have germinated and have grown up within society since this pandemic.

And there are other weeds that our society is contending with?

There is the weed that is racial injustice.

There is the weed that is police brutality.

There is the weed that is violence and civil unrest.

There is the weed that is the demonization of all police officers.

There is the weed that is fear.

There is the weed that is hate.

There is the weed that is indifference.

There is the weed that is cynicism.

There is the weed that is hopelessness.

There are a lot of weeds that are growing up within our society.

And it is like the crown vetch that I just can't seem to eradicate from my ivy once and for all.

It is like the crab grass and the clover that won't go away.

It is like the dandelions and the thistle that continues to rear its ugly head.

Yes, the weeds that invade our society just don't seem to want to go away.

No matter how hard we try.

No matter all the effort we put in to eliminating those weeds that plague our human family, we just can't seem to get rid of them.

And, if we do have some success in removing the weeds, it is not without affecting the plants we do not want to harm, but which we want to grow.

It is similar in that way to spraying Roundup.

Spraying Roundup on weeds not only kills the weed, but kills everything else, too.

PAUSE

But I am befuddled, sisters and brothers in Christ.

I am befuddled by our Gospel reading today, as maybe you are.

I am befuddled because the message of Jesus' parable is such that he says that nothing should be done to remove the weeds.

Nothing should be done to remove the "weeds" that grows among the wheat.

Nothing is to be done because in the process of removing those weeds, the wheat would be affected also.

But Jesus is not speaking here about “social ills,” those weeds that affect our human family.

No, Jesus is speaking about human beings that are associated as weeds.

Jesus speaks of them as children of the evil one.

He speaks of them as evildoers.

But notice that Jesus does not classify, nor categorize these persons as demons.

He still speaks of them as children, as though they have made poor decisions which has led to them doing evil.

But, they themselves are not demons.

Even though in our contemporary society we tend to demonize the other all too quickly.

The people on the left side of the aisle are to be demonized.

The people on the right side of the aisle are to be demonized.

The people who wear hoodies are to be demonized.

The people who wear police uniforms are to be demonized.

The people who behave this way are to be demonized.

The people who behave that way are to be demonized.

The people who do nothing at all are to be demonized.

No, the truth of the matter is that there is probably enough blame to go around for all of us.

We probably all contribute, probably in ways we are not even aware of...

We probably all contribute to the social ills that grow up around us.

We probably all have a little “weediness” going on inside us.

Indeed, by our very pointing fingers at some other party or some other group and saying that they are the “weeds,” not I, well then we have already crossed over into the realm of judgment, and we are ourselves are not looking too good.

By pointing fingers we are already showing our “weediness.”

And this may be the very reason that Jesus tells this parable, so as to remind the crowds not to judge their neighbors.

The farm hands in the parable come to the householder, to the farmer, and say, “Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?”

“No,” says the farmer.

And I believe that the farmer says “no,” because of the very harm that would come to the wheat.

The good plants, God’s people would suffer harm if they would become judges of their fellow human beings.

By judging others, we become weeds.

“Do you want us to go and gather in the weed?”

That question assumes that we have some divine power to be able to judge our neighbors.

Yes, we all have a little “weediness” in all of us.
Our immediate inclination, like the farm hands in our story...

Our immediate inclination is to judge the other, and in so doing we become a weed.

PAUSE

Did you ever notice for instance how it looks when someone is telling you about how awful another person is, what so and so did, what so and so said...

Have we ever noticed how that reflects poorly on the person who is telling us about that other?

The same idea is being expressed in the parable, when the farm hands want to go out and pull up the weeds.

The idea is that of judging the other.

Yes, we all have a little “weediness” inside us.

And so, thanks be God, that Jesus would spare us of this fate of judging others.

Don’t pull the weeds, because who are we to judge.

PAUSE

But, there something else going on here as well, I think.

And this goes back to our definition of a weed.

Not only is there a concern in this parable, such that we ourselves don’t become weeds by judging others.

But there is also space made in this parable for the possibility of those who are “weeds,” to become as wheat.

Again, Jesus calls the weeds “children,” implying that they may be persuaded to change.

They may at present do evil, but they are not evil themselves.

Weeds can change into wheat.

After all a weed is nothing else than a plant that is located in a place where we don't want it.

A person is still a person, and perhaps that person can be transplanted from a place where they make poor decisions that lead to ill consequences.

Perhaps that sort of person, that plant, can be transplanted to a place where they make good and Godly decisions.

Perhaps a person can go from weed to wheat, which is why I believe Jesus wants to leave time and space for the weed and wheat to grow together.

Who knows, maybe the entire field ultimately becomes entirely a field of wheat, with no weeds.

That would be our hope.

And wouldn't that be something!

Wouldn't it be something that come the day when the Son of Man sends his angles to reap the harvest that has been sown, what if that harvest were found to be nothing but wheat!

Wouldn't that be something!

PAUSE

Finally, I want to say, that even though we should not pull up the weeds, or judge our neighbors, it does not mean that we are not about trying to bring change to society.

We should work to pull up social ills by the root.

We should root out the social ills that invade our society.

But this most difficult work is also delicate work, because it means that we don't demonize people, that we don't classify people as weeds.

This is the difficult work of the Christian farm hand—we work to root out social ills, but at the same time we seek not to destroy the dignity and humanity of those who might oppose us.

How does one do that?

Jesus had to die to root out sin and death, to root out those social ills.

We are not Jesus, but nevertheless, we will have to learn to be at least self-giving, self-humbling, selfless, if we hope to reform society, if we hope to create a full harvest of wheat. Amen.