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Fr. Jim Cook

“The Wheat and Weeds.”

Even though I’m nearly 60 years old, I’m still surprised when I’m reminded (by whatever means) that the world in which we live, or the family into which we’ve been born, or even the church of which we’re a part, is not an entirely trustworthy place.

Every day, we’re reminded that the world has places of wonder, but alleys of cruelty, too. That families can cause deep pain, as well as great joy. And that the church can be inspiringly courageous in one moment, and petty and faithless in the next.

Or, to use the imagery contained in our gospel reading, weeds have invaded our garden. And the question we’ve all asked, at one time or another, is: “How can we get rid of all these weeds?” Well, today’s gospel tells us what we can do.

In the parable of the wheat and weeds, the landowner had planted wheat throughout his property. However, someone else later came along and planted weeds throughout the same land. Later, when the wheat began to grow, so did the weeds.

So what's the mystery? You got weeds? We know what to do with them, don't we?

A lot of people have gardens. My wife has a number of lovely flower beds around our house. And even though I don't have a green thumb, I do understand two of the basic principles of gardening:

First, you choose what you *want* to grow in your garden.

And, second, you remove whatever you *don't* want to grow in your garden.

Simple.

Now, if attending to life were like attending to a garden, it seems like things could be a lot easier:

We could choose which people would be welcomed into our presence,

and which people simply had to go.

However, even though today's gospel reading is telling us that the community of faith is *like* a garden, it also tells us enough to know that we can't behave as though it *actually was* a garden.

For example, and if you recall, it wasn't up to the *laborers* in the parable to decide which plants got to stay, and which plants had to go; that was the *landowner's* prerogative. Well, in much the same way, neither is it up to *us* to decide who will be a part of our community, and who won't; that's *God's* prerogative.

And remember also: just as the laborers in the parable weren't able to distinguish the weeds from the wheat — the “weeds” in our parable, scholars think, was the Bearded Darnel, which looks remarkably like wheat, until it comes time for them to begin bearing fruit — in so many cases neither are we able to distinguish the desirable members of our community from the undesirable members. Oh, on occasion our radars may be accurate, but in the long run, and for most people, our batting average is not so good.

So what are we to do? Well, we've just been told, in the parable, that we have no *authority* to decide who's in and who's out. And we've also been told that we usually can't even *tell* who's supposed to be in and who's supposed to be out. So, I ask again, what are we to do? Just treat everyone alike?

Exactly!

And more.

In our reading this morning from the psalter, we heard this:

“But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.”

All of which tells us that, not only does God judge with mildness, and governs with kindness and forbearance, but also that we are to do likewise.

And though we may not like this advice at first blush, it turns out to be pretty good advice.

For if we're willing to forgo the weeding out of those we deem undesirable, those so-called "undesirables" might likewise be willing to forgo their attempts to weed us out.

And what's more, if we take this advice, we'll see that it gives us permission to relax a bit; to stop depleting our resources in trying to figure out who's right and who's wrong, who's a saint and who's a sinner, and, instead, using those resources in figuring out how to get along.

You see, a point often overlooked in this parable — but a point full of good news to us worry-wart weeders — is the fact that, although the wheat and weeds were growing side by side, and despite the fact that it was an "enemy" that planted the weeds, nevertheless the weeds *posed no real threat* to the wheat.

In fact, the only threat to the wheat was posed by the well-meaning laborers, who, in their efforts at weeding out the weeds, would have done as much damage to the wheat.

In other words, in our attempts to clean up the church, we can be our own worst enemies.

But we shouldn't mistake today's gospel as a call to passivity in the face of evil. There is no divine command here to ignore injustice in the world, or violence in society, or wrongs done in the church.

Obviously, when faced with societal evils, we should do all in our power to stop them. But today's gospel is a reminder that — and to quote Saint Paul — that “we see through a glass darkly”; that our powers of judgment and discernment are always hindered by our all-too-human frailties and foibles.

So we need to be careful.

Very careful.

But at the same time, we can rest assured that God already has a plan for dealing with the weeds, so we don't have to worry so much about it.

[Story about Laura and the dandelions.]

You see, sometimes, the difference between wheat and weeds, are in the eyes of the beholder.

As I read this parable, the challenge for us is to try and figure out a way to trust God; to trust that God actually knows what he's doing. And, to trust that, when confronted with the gospel's call for kindness and forbearance, on the one hand, and the world's call for vengeance and vindication, on the other, that responding to the gospel will always be the better choice.

Let us pray:

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit life us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.