

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

FCCS Rev. Curran Reichert July 19, 2020

“One Bad Apple”

What does it mean when someone says “defund the Police?” What does it mean when another says, “don’t throw out the whole bushel because of one or two bad apples.” Well, it’s complicated and not unlike the discussion Jesus is having with the disciples about the wheat and the weeds. How do you save what is good while getting rid of what is bad? Unfortunately, with wheat as with justice, the answers are rarely cut and dry.

I mentioned last week that Jesus is always on the side of the oppressed, always in favor of justice for those on the margins, *frontline* communities are where Jesus put the bulk of his attention and that just didn’t sit right with those who were rich and powerful.

This passage is one in a series of passages about the way Jesus is perpetually on the outs with the authorities because he refuses to play by their rules. He healed on the Sabbath, he cast out demons without becoming one himself, told those who want to follow him that not everyone is cut out for the job. In keeping with the agricultural motif, Jesus is now busy teaching about the good and bad of this world.

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“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* 1918–1956

The point of the parable, I think, is that it’s impossible to sort out evil from good. As long as we live on this earth, in these earthen vessels we will encounter both within and outside of ourselves all that is evil and all that is good. Being made in the image of God we are told that we are capable of deep goodness- yet we struggle- we struggle with so much of what is bad for us and for others, bad for the planet, bad for the world. I do believe that as people of faith and goodwill we have the power to transform what is weedy into wheat.

What we cannot do, is lie about which is which: a weed is a weed by any other name. A bad idea is a bad idea, even if millions of people pretend that it's not. A weed must be fully revolutionized in order to overcome its desire to choke the life out of everything around it.

If it were your field, and your glorious wheat was being choked and strangled by the weeds of injustice, what would you do?

One thing we do as disciples of Jesus is to look for ways to stand with one another. We look out for people who have been hurt, those who might be vulnerable or feeling afraid- and we reach out. We encircle them to ensure their safety, to let them know that they are not alone. Then, we look for ways together to heal, ways to stand in solidarity with each other's pain, that is how brokenness gets healed. We as a society will be healthy when everyone is healthy.

History shows that policing in the US was built on a bad idea. Policing in the colonies came into being to force enslaved people to submit to slave masters. Policing in this country was designed not to maintain the peace, but to protect white landowners. That is a weed.

Northern European people were taught that the black body was subhuman, they believed that black bodies could endure greater pain than white bodies, therefore policing black bodies "necessitated" the infliction of immeasurable physical cruelty. That is the legacy obviously still with us.

When communal policing by largely uneducated white people began to prove less than effective and enslaved people tried to escape tyrannical slave owning masters, Plantation owners turned to military generals to train average low wage-earning policemen in military tactics, again, in order to subdue black bodies.

So why are people crying out for police reform? Because it is not a few bad apples that are rotten, the system was rotten from the beginning. Law enforcement must therefore be completely reimaged and organized around a system of promoting wellness, because again a society is healthy when all of its members are healthy. Revolution, reformation and imagination is how we turn weeds into wheat.

Rev. Katie Morrison, is a leader in our congregation. She was brought up with a greater sense of cultural integration than the majority of folks in our country. She grew up outside of Pasadena and went to John Muir High School which counts among its alumni the famous Jackie Robinson.

She was the only pale skinned singer in her schools “Show Choir,” earning her the nickname “Caucasian Kate.” She grew up with black heroes and an open heart for people from every walk of life. That perspective has served her well for many years in ministry both in the PCUSA and in the UCC. Now Katie shares her big heart as a special needs teacher in Venetia Valley with children the world refers to as those with “special needs.” She calls them “extraordinary learners” and helps them to see what is beautiful about them, finds ways to encourage each of them to learn and grow, because a society is healthy when everyone is healthy.

It was her vision to create a visible symbol of solidarity with Black Lives Matter. It was through Katie’s vision that Jesus’ powerful message of the worth of all God’s people is being expressed on our church lawn.

It has taken dozens of volunteers, a gas-powered auger, a lot of muscle and sweat, fifteen gallons of paint, sanders, planers, painters, drills, calligraphers, researchers and writers- weeks of laboring under the hot Sonoma sun, to create the wheat we can recognize as an act of love. A symbol that others will recognize as sacred, an opportunity for engagement and transformation in an installation called, “Pray Their Names.”

In the spirit of the Aids Quilt that gave people a way to relate to bodies lost to the dreaded disease of HIV/Aids. In the spirit of the Thousand Cranes, a movement for peace reminding us of the ravages of nuclear devastation on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the spirit of Holocaust memorials that help humanity grieve eleven million lives lost in deathcamps that grew up out of a sense of white body supremacy. In the spirit of a bronze monument and soon a Ting in the park that bears witness to the travesty of the white body supremacy that led to untold deaths of countless indigenous and Chinese bodies brought here to build this town we call home. “Pray Their Names,” evokes the spirit of all that is good in us.

Literally, out of the weeds in our front yard hearts now bloom. Hearts that invite us to walk, think, weep and pray. For surely to see what has been lost, to see the lives that have been stolen from families, from communities, from a nation- to see all of that death may be just what it takes for us to finally rise up and say no more. Not one more death of a black or trans body, a transient, or immigrant, not one more ICE raid, or industrialized prisons built in our nation- a weed is a weed no matter how many people say that it is not.

May each of you in your own time, and maybe several times come and walk amidst the rows of hearts with names so carefully inscribed on each one.

Pray for an end to the pandemic of racism. Pray for equity and justice for all. Pray for the safety and the sanctity of all God's people. Pray for the health of our nation because our society will become a safer place for everyone when everyone is healthy.

Amen