

July 17, 2011 - Year A
Matthew 13:24-43
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We were out of town for a few days last summer,

- and when we got back -

- there was a new plant growing in the front flower bed.

- I knew someone had given us

- some black eyed susans,

- so I assumed that must be what it was -

- and I left it alone -

- As the weeks went along -

- the plant continued to grow,

- but so did some others -

- the leaves looked different -

- and I began to wonder if perhaps-

- the new plants were the black eyed susans -

- Now since I know very little about plants,

- I decided that until there was a bloom,

- there was really no way for me to know the identity of each plant.-

- I mean -

- I guess I could have brought in an expert -

- or tried to make comparisons to photos online -

- but I opted for the wait and see approach -

- let the plants grow -

- and see what happens -

- I mean after all,

- who knows what each plant might be -

- So I waited,

- and both plants grew.

- Eventually flowers began to bloom on the second set of plants -

- those in fact were the black eyed susans -

- and that first plant -

- well - nothing ever bloomed -

- it was, I think,

- a fancy looking weed.

- Now had I rushed in - - -

- had I tried to make the judgement

- before each plant had the opportunity to grow

- I probably would have pulled up the flowers -

- and left the weeds -

- but by letting both plants grow to maturity -

- it became obvious which was the flower -

- and which was the weed. - -

- Once the blooms appeared,

- the task of separating the plant from weed,

- was fairly simple -

- and ultimately,

- waiting to make that judgement- -

- costs me nothing.

- Sometimes rushing to judgement -

- is not only unnecessary -

- it is also counter-productive -

- Oh - I know for some people,

- there is something about weeds

- that makes them want to rush in and pull them all up immediately -

- I don't know if we are worried that they will

- overrun the "good" plants -

- or just make things look ugly -

- or if it a desire to control this little plot of land -

- but I know it's hard for some people to allow

- even one weed to grow. -

- They might even invest hours and hours,

- day after day -

- scouring the ground -

- to make sure that not one

- improper plant grows -

- in this sacred space.

- Seemingly never taking into account

- the possibility that the "weed" they pull out -

- if it was given a chance to grow -

- might turn out to be a beautiful wildflower

- growing from a seed scattered by the wind.

- The servants in the parable Jesus tells today -

- are obviously quite eager to get into the field and pull up all the weeds that

- the enemy has scattered in the fields -

- they say -

“do you want us to go and gather them?” (13:28)

- It’s almost if the weeds are an affront to their sensibilities -

- and need to be immediately removed, - -

- but the Master knows better -

- “No” he said,

“for in gathering the weeds

- you would uproot the wheat

- along with them.

³⁰Let 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.”(Matt 13:29-30)

- ‘It won’t hurt anything,

- to let it all grow -

- and sort it out at the end’ -

- the Master seems to be saying -

- and that way -

- we won’t accidentally destroy any of the wheat - -

- Now I know it’s easy -

- when we first hear this parable -
 - to jump immediately to the end
 - and focus on the weeds getting bundled up and burned -
 - phrases like “furnace of fire” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth” -
 - are hard to ignore -
 - but to me
 - if we focus primarily on the description of what happens to
 - the causes of sin and the evildoers -
 - to the weeds gathered from the field, -
 - then I think we risk missing the primary point that Jesus is trying to make -
 - which is quite simply -
 - that it is the reapers -
 - the angels -
 - not the slaves -
 - not the workers in the field -
 - who are the ones who will make a judgement on what is a weed -
 - and what is wheat -
 - and not only that -
 - but also that the decision about which plant is a weed -
 - and which plant is wheat
 - will not take place -
 - until the plants have grown to full maturity.
- Now I don't know what was going on around Jesus -
 - that prompted him to tell this parable -

- perhaps there were a few overzealous followers -
 - who were becoming judgmental -
 - who were becoming self-appointed “kingdom police” -
 - trying to determine who was worthy of the kingdom
 - and who was not -
 - or it could be that Jesus was simply anticipating a problem
 - that he knew would arise at some point in the future,
- but as a pastor named Elizabeth Johnson rightly pointed out this week,

“This [desire to judge] seems to be a temptation for followers of Jesus in every age.

- We whip ourselves into a weeding frenzy,
 - certain that we know the difference between weeds and wheat,
 - and that **w**e know how to deal with the weeds!”

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?tab=4&alt=1>

- Have you every known someone like that?
 - someone for whom the presence of “weeds”
 - is just to much to ignore. -
 - They feel like they have to act -
 - feel like they are qualified to make the judgement -
 - that they know how to deal with these weeds -
 - and that it is time to get out into the field -
 - and pull them all out,

- Well - I imagine Jesus knew a few folks like this as well,

 - and that’s why I think he is clearly stating that -
 - the task of gathering and separating the weeds and the wheat -

- the task of judging who is a part of the kingdom
 - and who is not a part of the kingdom -
 - is a heavenly task, not a human one -
- Jesus is clear that if we try to do the weeding -
 - try to do the judging ourselves
 - well - - we will end up doing more harm than good.
- Unlike God,
 - you and I simply cannot be certain who is "in" or who is "out" of the kingdom. - - -
 - And as I have said many times, - - -
 - Thank goodness who is "in" and who is "out" of the kingdom
 - is not a decision we are asked to make
 - for without the wisdom of God -
 - without the ability to see beyond our own prejudices and faults,
 - it is very easy for us judge something to be a weed -
 - as I did with the black eyed susans -
 - when actually what we mistake for a weed -
 - is an early stage
 - in the path to maturity and beauty. -
 - the Good news Jesus is proclaiming today -
 - is that we can leave the weeding to the angels,
 - leave the judging to God -
 - and God in God's wisdom -
 - at the time of the harvest -
 - will separate out the causes of evil -

- and gather God's people together forever -

- which means you and I

- and all of God's people -

- like the servants in the parable -

- can focus on the mission Jesus has given us -

- sowing the seeds of God's love

- proclaiming the good news that

- the kingdom of God drawing near -

- and leaving the judging and separating out

- where it belongs

- firmly in God's skilled and gracious hands.