

Sermon, July 19, 2020

Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 “Seeds: Growing in Grace: Growing in the Weeds” By Rev. Dr. Brian Jones



If you haven't had a chance yet to hear last week's message by Pastor Alice, I would encourage you to go online and listen to it. It's a great message on Jesus' parable on the sower. If you did hear it, I'd encourage you to listen to it again; I enjoyed it for a couple of reasons. It was a great Biblical approach on the sower. But I also enjoyed it because of her insight to the soil.

She shared a little about her background in soil conservation before she was called into ministry, and you don't have to get very far into her message as she talked about it to know that she really knows her stuff when it comes to soil.

I think I enjoyed that for a couple of reasons. One is that I simply enjoy hearing people talk about subjects they know very well. I find it interesting to hear someone who is knowledgeable in a subject talk about it. Also, because I have to admit, soil is not one of those things I think about all that much.

When I do think about soil, I think about the home I grew up at and how it was farmland that hadn't been used for a while until we built our home there. And the first year we lived there, my father decided to plant a

garden, which he did with unbridled glee. This soil was incredibly rich in nutrients, hadn't been planted in for a long time. And when he planted the garden, we received an incredible bounty of crops. Everything grew. And I mean everything. They got so much yield, they had a hard time keeping up with it and canned a lot of vegetables that year, as well as having crates of potatoes, onions, all sorts of things. I still remember how bountiful that first garden was.

But do you know what else grows in rich soil in gardens? Weeds. Lots and lots of weeds. A bumper crop of weeds. And who do you think was given the task of daily going to battle with the weeds? Me. And I hated it. You just never felt that you could keep ahead of them. No matter how many you pulled, there were always more to deal with. I can remember my father saying "you know, if you just pulled some weeds every time you went outside, you could get ahead". Just pull them as soon as you see them, which is probably bad advice to give to a 10 year old. I had a hard time remembering where my shoes were let alone voluntarily seeing weeds.

But battle on we did. Why did we keep pulling weeds? Because if we didn't pull them, they would overtake the garden and eventually choke out the plants we wanted. You know, every day I pulled the weeds I would wish there was no such thing as weeds. Wouldn't it be easier if there were no weeds? And do you know what happened when I made that wish? Nothing. Nothing happened; as much as I wished there were no weeds, they would always be there. Wishing them away didn't make them disappear.

I'm reminded of Kipling's quote "gardens are not made by singing "Oh how beautiful" and sitting in the shade." Wishes will only get one so far. If you want a beautiful garden, then you have to work at it. And if you want a beautiful garden, then you need to be prepared to deal with the weeds; they just won't go away.

I want you to keep that quote in your heart or in the back of your mind not just today, but as we go through this new series Planting Seeds. We are looking at what seeds does God plant or are we to plant that allow us to grow in grace, to go deeper. In others words, wanting the fruit of the spirit, wishing for God's grace isn't enough. We have to plant seeds. We can't sit in the shade.

And when we plant those seeds of grace, when we roll up our sleeves and get serious about growing deeper in our faith, the weeds will come. Wishing them away will not make them disappear. That's at the heart of Jesus' parable in today's scripture. Jesus says in this parable that being a Christian, trying to live a life of righteousness and holiness will be deflect because there will always be evil around us. Those Jesus calls the children of the evil one. He doesn't mean they are demonic, but that they are conduits of evil. They act as weeds to choke the life and growth out of your spirit. These are the people who try to pull you away from God. Or people who grieve your heart, cause you pain. Who act in horrible ways against you. The people who depress your spirit. Make you anxious, cause you maybe to be fearful. Who aggravate you.

People who aren't really evil, but they live their lives making it very hard for you to be a Christian around them.

So let me ask the question in that manner. Do you have people in your life who make it hard for you to be a Christian when they are around? Who really challenge your faith? Who cause you so much stress that your spiritual life is not bearing the fruit it should bear? Now, don't name names or point to anyone. But do you have people like that in your life? These are the people Jesus says are the weeds. Because they cut you off from the nutrients of fellowship with the Holy Spirit, they keep you from bearing spiritual fruit, and they lower your yield; in other words they impede your ministry and effectiveness in the body of Christ. They act as weeds.

And Jesus says here, very clearly you can wish it weren't so. You can wish that there were no people in your life acting as spiritual weeds. You can wish there was no one who challenged your faith. You can wish it all you want, but until Jesus returns, they will always be there. Wishing you had an easier time of being holy will not make it so. You have to deal with the weeds in life.

So how do we deal with the weeds? What can we plant in our hearts to help us deal with these people? Jesus and Paul give us some ways we can deal with those people who act like weeds in our lives. First, Jesus says in this parable, "Look, in the end, the weeds are God's problem, not yours." Jesus says "God will separate them in the end. They aren't against you, they are against Me." So let them be God's problem and not yours. Don't let the people who are weeds in your life take over your life. Remember, in the end, they are not your problem, they are God's.

Paul expands on this in the passage we read from the book of Romans. If you've got some weeds in your life, hear what Paul says to us. Paul says, "The weeds in life can overtake us if we forget who we are." Paul says "who are we? We, you and I, are the adopted children of God. When the weeds of life are trying to take you over, run you down, make you feel as if you aren't worth anything, Paul says "remember, the reality is you have been adopted into the family of God. Never let the weeds take your identity from you."

If you want to overcome the weeds in your life, not only do you need to know who you are, you need to know what you have. Paul says if we are adopted, then we are heirs. When you are an heir, you have everything the family has, it's your right. You, as an adopted child of God, have the fruit of the spirit, the spiritual gifts, and the power of the Holy Spirit at your fingertips. This is why John says "greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world. The weeds don't go away, but they need not overcome you. You have resources, the weeds do not have to overcome your life.

We know who we are, what we have, and where we are going. Paul says he understands that suffering, living amongst the weeds in life, is not God's punishment, but a way for us draw closer to God as our trials

push us closest to Him. They sharpen and strengthen our faith in ways that an easy, weed-free life could never do to us. And they allow us to be a part of the redemptive process of the world. I don't know why we, as the church, assume that our part in redeeming the world will be easy, trouble and pain-free when Jesus clearly shows us on the Cross what our path will be. But that's OK. When we know where we are going, what our destination is, rather than wishing the weeds away, we allow that experience to help us minister to the world around us.

Wishes won't make the weeds go away. But thank God they don't have to. Know who you are, what you have, and where you are going. Amen.