



Pastor Chris Marien
Matthew 13:24-30

Sunday July 19, 2020

Reflection: Weeds in the Kale

Author Barbara Brown Taylor tells the following story. In one of the first crusades, knights from western Europe blew through an Arab town on their way to the Holy Land and killed everyone in sight. It was not until later, when they turned the bodies over, that they found crosses around most of their victims' necks. It never occurred to them that Christians came in brown as well as white.

So because we often can't tell the wheat from the weeds, and they are so often intertwined, we see that the landowner seems more interested that things grow than he is in what is believed to be uniform or need to be conformed in the field he planted.

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.

We planted a second garden bed this year. The first one has been less-than-stellar in its production of vegetables. And so we decided to create a second garden bed in a different area, different water drainage, different sunlight amounts, different soil composition. And when the garden bed was planted and the starts were at about a foot in height, I read an article about spraying a mixture of Epsom salt and water on the leaves. I told my wife I was going to do this and she looked at me and said, "If you kill all my plants..." And I assured her I knew what I was doing but we both knew I did not. And the next morning I sprayed every leaf of every tomato plant, each zucchini plant, every yellow squash, every eggplant and the peas and the Brussel sprouts (like that would be a loss if they died). And then I waited. The next morning, I got up before my wife to check whether or not I had indeed killed every plant in her garden. And to my surprise – all the plants were still standing strong – not a single leaf had wilted or fallen to the ground. Victory! But a week later, I still did not notice any change to the size of the plants – they had grown of course -but I think I was expecting some sort of "Jack and the Beanstalk" kind of growth explosion. And now some seven weeks later, both gardens have exploded. Tomatoes are six feet high. Green beans and cucumbers have invaded all other garden plants. Zucchini are telling their friends about how wonderful this garden bed is. Brussel sprouts are proclaiming the joy of being in our garden, and the peas have overwhelmed their trellis. But the lettuce – the lettuce and kale – they have grown almost two feet. And after the harvest of the first round of lettuce, I noticed that in the kale there are weeds hidden – also enjoying the extra magnesium for their fruitfulness. Now please understand, I can tear out weeds and kale together and not even give a second thought but my wife is making kale chips and sneaks that kale into omelets – what to do? It did not occur to me that the benefits of the Epsom salt mix would also boost the growth of the weeds just sprouted in the garden.

For me, this year has been about celebrating the little moments of growth along with the bigger challenges that have woven their way into my life.

I am grateful that God is patient with me just as I learned to be patient with the garden beds and the weeds in the midst of the kale. People keep telling me of the benefits of kale – just like I keep telling people about the benefit of wearing a mask. A little growth in learning to accept kale as something nutritious – a little growth in wearing a mask in settings outside of my own home. And look at what God has done in our garden this year. I wonder what the wearing of a mask offers to us? Worshipping together – yes. Taking communion with my faith community – yes. Being reminded that I am not alone – yes. Remembering that God tells us again and again: *Do not fear or be afraid.* God knows I need to hear those words, all reminders that I have needed over these last months.

From Isaiah 44: Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

A catholic priest offers us this comment to bring us closer to the Gospel reading for today of the wheat and the weeds. He says, "I am certain there will be three surprises in heaven: I will see some people I never expected to see. There will be a number whom I expected to see who will not be there and the biggest surprise is that I will be there." I would add, by the promise of God in Jesus Christ and the very grace of God alone. Amen.