

Lord, make these words to be your Word, that our hearts might become your Heart.

Poll: Dandelions – are they flowers or weeds? Do you prefer lawns or meadows? A friend in seminary used to say, "Weeds are a social category." She meant that many of the plants we deem weeds are perfectly good plants. Someone just decided they were weeds, just as someone decided a uniform lawn of all grass, all the same length was aesthetically more pleasing than a meadow of wildflowers... many of which such people would deem weeds.

It's one thing when we say it about gardens and lawns,
quite another when we apply this thinking to people.
That is how racism works – someone says, "White skin is more pleasing;
white people are inherently more gifted, intelligent, worthy."
In the 18th and 19th centuries there were many attempts to establish this using
bogus science and specious scholarship; we've all seen where the results lead.

But Jesus wasn't talking about distinguishing people by color or ethnicity –
he was talking about making moral judgments, distinguishing by character.
Surely that's okay, right? How would we function if we didn't distinguish
the good from the bad? Oh, and it's so easy to do that, isn't it?
So easy to label and condemn those who hurt others. Because we don't do that.
We know who the weeds are, right? And we can pull them right up.
It's not so easy, friends. As the adage goes, Hurt people hurt people.
Behind every child molester is a molested child, a traumatizing home.
And, as Jesus said, if you just try to root out the evil doers,
you take out the wheat too. We're far too connected for that.
Jesus isn't saying there is no judgment – there very much is, and it sounds scary.
But it's God's job. Not ours.

How did Jesus handle the "weeds" of his day, the economic predators,
the loose women, the seedy men on the margins of society?
He hung out with them. The religious leaders, the Pharisees, did not like that.
I think in this parable they are the servants who want to eliminate the weeds.
Jesus says that is not God's way.
The Bible is full of people who might be considered "weeds."
Jacob whom we read about this morning could be seen in that light.

From the moment of his birth, a split second after his twin brother, he was trying to get ahead. He cheated Esau out of his birthright, and then his mother helped him trick Isaac into giving Jacob his final blessing instead of giving to Esau. At that point, Esau wanted to kill him, so Jacob left his home and set out to make a life for himself somewhere else. That's where we find him in today's story, on the road, camping out, asleep. And God gives him a dream full of promise. Now Jacob will go on to sometimes cheat people, and get cheated, and take on several wives and concubines, and bear twelve sons and numerous daughters – His life doesn't always look exemplary. To many he's a weed. But he's God's weed.

Simon Peter had some “weed-like” tendencies, as did Levi and Zaccheus and other tax collectors whom Jesus called to follow him.

Mary Magdalene, while there is nothing in scripture to suggest she was a harlot or prostitute, was clearly a traumatized and damaged woman until Jesus set her free; She would have been seen as a weed.

But all of those “weeds” Jesus met were transformed. God's way, as Jesus told it and showed it, is to live alongside, discerning what is fruitful and what is not.

And who knows what kinds of cross-fertilization can happen in that mixed field? We know trends toward sin and evil can spread; so can healing and love.

At this point in our nation's history, we seem as divided as we've ever been, and all kinds of people, including me, are pretty sure we can judge who's weed and who's wheat.

Some people make it really easy, being as hateful as they possibly can be.

But I don't know what's in the heart of an internet troll – what messages of condemnation he picked up along the way that hardened his heart.

And I don't know what happened to a police officer who misuses his power – someone made him feel pretty powerless at some point.

None of that excuses or condones destructive behavior – but it invites us to judge behavior, not people.

In telling this story, so subtly subversive, Jesus was telling those who would follow him how things work in God's field – and what a big job we have.

Jesus is inviting us, his followers, to start cross-fertilizing God's values.

We can be pollinating other plants with goodness,

with a capacity to love and forgive and see the best in and pray for healing for, until God looks out and sees fields and fields of pure wheat, waving in the sun, exactly as the planter intended it to be. *Amen.*

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Jesus put before the crowd 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!”

Genesis 28:10-19a

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel.