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AMDG

Proper 11A – July 23, 2017

So many weeds. My backyard is filling up with them. And, where just a tiny little sprout came up last week, there is now a huge plant. I want to pull them all up. I guess that's why Jesus used them as a metaphor. They easily represent what does not belong, whether they're in a garden or in our individual lives or in the world as a whole. Weeds are things that don't match our vision of order, beauty, and efficiency.

In today's Gospel, again we have that crazy sower, who would allow weeds to grow up alongside good plants, and let the separating of weeds and grain happen later. This is the same crazy farmer who in last week's Gospel would fling good seed indiscriminately over good soil and bad. It all goes against our idea of order and worth. Why not plant good seeds carefully in well-prepared soil? Why not yank up the weeds as they come out so the good plants don't have to compete for nutrients and moisture? But, that's not God's plan. God's plan is more extravagant than we could imagine. Earlier in Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave his followers a glimpse of that grand plan, the heavenly kingdom where those who mourn are comforted, the meek inherit the earth, those who hunger and thirst are filled, where mercy is freely given, and the beloved see God. And, later he described how we would work for that kingdom, and also receive glimpses of it - by loving our neighbors as ourselves, by giving generously, by forgiving our enemies, by serving those in need, and by trusting God to provide.

Jesus calls us all to work for this kingdom - As Bishop Michael Curry puts it, "Jesus says, 'Follow me and love will show you how to become more than you ever dreamed you could be. Follow me and I will help you change the world from the nightmare it often is into the dream that God intends.'"

Yet, while working for God's kingdom is our job, it is God's task to make it real. He is the master builder; we are the laborers. He is the farmer, we are the field workers. But, we confuse those two. As God's servants, we live in a world that so often doesn't match what we believe

God's vision is. We identify with the poor servants in the parable, frustrated "that an enemy" has wrecked our Master's plans. We want to make it right, even at the risk of ruining the good plants. How many times have we felt like "an enemy has done this"? When the cancer returns, when the job goes away, when the relationship ends, when depression sets in, when addiction lays waste to the lives of those we love, when a loved one's life is cut short, when war and persecution force the people to flee their homelands, when the world turns its back on people in need. This is not the world God intended. And, living and working in this place between beauty and brokenness, can be very painful.

Brokenness is not God's plan. God does not will evil for us, not in any way, shape, or form. God never, ever wants us to suffer, needlessly. However, our world does have pain and sorrow, some of it just part of living, some of it of our own making. And, as Paul reminds us in Romans, our sufferings pale in comparison to the glory of God's kingdom. That's why God became like one of us in Jesus. Through him God's love redeems it all. And we can all witness to this in our own lives. When things we thought were the worst that could happen, turn out to be for our good. When a broken heart mends and opens us to more loving relationships than we could have imagined. When the loss of a job creates opportunity for better employment. When tending to the needs of others allows us to see the face of God. The chief example of this for me is the cross itself. The cross offers supreme testimony that evil happens and yet it is not strong enough to defeat God's love. While it is up to God to sort out the wheat and the weed, good and evil, we certainly must deplore the evil that runs through our world, in country, our household, and our individual lives. And, we must also work for the good in ourselves, in our communities, and in the world. But ultimately, it is up to God to make it all good. And, God is good at that. We are not. We would make the world in our image, rather than according to God's dream. And, more often than not we want to start with getting rid of the weeds. In our arrogance we would decide which plants are worthy and which are not, which is a weed and which is a fruitful plant. For some reason we seem driven to point out what we think is wrong with others and the world around us rather than working

to change what is wrong in ourselves and in our own small corners of the world. In our zeal to identify weeds, we neglect to notice the weeds we plant, and the weeds we nurture. I think that's what Jesus was trying to do with this parable was to move attention away from the things that aren't our concern back to what should be our concern. We do incredibly destructive things with our own lives, and spending time in the weeds distracts us from our own destructive financial choices, our own damaging health choices, and our hurtful relationship choices.

No, our job is to tend the garden, and leave the Big Picture stuff to the Master Planner. Trusting that God will redeem the world frees us to take responsibility for our little bit of it. To live our lives in love. We don't have to defeat evil and death – that's God's job. But take loving care of our own lives, and loving our neighbor as our self. Can't we do that? We can care for the sick, speak out against injustice, welcome the stranger at our doors, root out prejudice and hatred from our own lives...right here and right now. We don't have to worry about the weeds or who planted the weeds, but we can carefully tend the garden entrusted to us.

Waiting for God to redeem the world is hard. This inbetween place that we live in can be painful. It's hard to see God's world broken and torn; it's hard to work for peace and justice, and still see so much hatred and selfishness in the world. It's hard to toil in the garden without knowing the details of God's plan. But, in the meantime, confident of God's love and mercy, trusting in God's justice and redemption, we can nurture the wheat and strengthen what is good all around us. God will take care of the rest.