

7-23-17

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

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### Dandelions and Cockleburs

I've heard a couple of you talking about your gardens lately and the weeds that you're always fighting. Earlier in the spring it was too wet to really get in there. You thought you would let it dry out a little bit. It did dry out, but by then your weeds were two feet tall, had sunk their roots down deep and decided they weren't going anywhere. Perhaps those of you who have your own garden can relate to the parable that Jesus told about the wheat and the weeds.

It seems that this farmer went out and planted some really good seed wheat on his land, but during the night an enemy came in and planted some seed that were weeds in the field. So when the wheat crop sprouts up, a whole mess of weeds also sprout. Fortunately the slaves seem to come up with a solution to this problem. They ask the master if they should go out and pull all of these weeds out? But the master says no. I don't want you to accidentally pull some of the wheat up. Just leave the weeds until harvest time.

Well, I don't know a whole lot about gardening or about farming for that matter, but it seems to me that the practice of not pulling out weeds until the harvest time is no way to run a farm. First of all the weeds contribute to the choking of the good plants and secondly not pulling the weeds out before harvest guarantees a bumper crop of unwanted seed of weeds for the next seasons planting. It doesn't sound like a very smart move on the part of the farmer letting all those weeds grow with the wheat.

I have a question for all of you this morning. Do any of you own any Oneida silverware or cookware? Or if you don't own any have you hear of the name? The Oneida Company is one of the largest American manufacturers of cookware, flatware and silverware in the United States. Oneida is almost a household name, but in a book that I read I found out about the beginnings of the company.

The Oneida Company was a religious community before they ever started making spoons. Its founder, John Noyes, was the son of a senator and an educated man. Noyes entered first Andover and then Yale seminaries at the encouragement of his mother to become a pastor. He spent his seminary years struggling with how he could be a Christian, a baptized child of God, and yet be experiencing temptations such as greed, pride and lust. Hadn't Jesus come to take away his sins and save him? Why was he then still surrounded by all kinds of sin, evil and temptation?

After a religious experience of some sort Noyes shocked his professors and the congregation he was preaching to by proclaiming that he had received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit which had purified him and he was now without sin. Well, you can probably imagine that when a pastor gets up in front of a congregation and announces that he is without sin, his sermon is not going to be received very well. Noyes was relieved from his duties as pastor and eventually kicked out of seminary for his unorthodox thinking.

But this didn't stop John Noyes. Noyes eventually gathered a small group of followers and formed a commune near the town of Oneida, New York in 1848. This community which Noyes was the leader of had some very grand claims and some very big ambitions.

The members of this community shared all things in common. They eventually built a common living space where everyone lived in identical rooms. Everyone was provided with food and clothing and the necessities of life and everyone worked at their farm and eventually their silverware factory without receiving a wage, but receiving whatever items they needed from the community. All the members of the community also believed that by Christ and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit they were made perfect and without sin. They lived as a single family and life there was relatively harmonious, which was not an easy thing for them to accomplish since their family included about 200 people who were mostly living in one building which they called the Mansion House.

The Oneida Community survived for about thirty-five years, but eventually they saw some of the evil and sin creeping back into their community which they thought they were immuned to. People resented John Noyes, the founder of the community because they thought he had too much power. People were angry because some of the community members only worked a couple of hours a day and still received food and clothing. People were greedy. The Silverware Company was doing well and they wanted their own share of the profits. Eventually the Oneida community pretty much broke up and the only thing that survived was the Oneida Company which still makes silverware today.

The dying days of the community were ugly with even people who had been spiritual leaders resorting to slander and lies against their neighbors. It seemed in the end that the sin and evil which the Oneida community had through they were without showed itself again. Sin

and evil appearing in people who were at the same time good and kind and caring. Sin and evil appearing in people who claimed they were without sin.

The slaves said to Jesus, “Master do you want us to go and tear all of the weeds out of the field?”

And Jesus said, “No, because when you tear out the weeds you might uproot the wheat also. Just let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest time.” Good and evil not only inhabit the same field, but also inhabit the same individual human being. The good and the evil grow side by side in each of us. It sounds like a pretty shocking thing to say, but it is something we admit to ever Sunday morning when we say in the confession and forgiveness, “I have sinned against you in thought word and deed by things that I have done and by things that I have left undone.”

In this parable that Jesus tells us about the wheat and the weeds, Jesus gives us two pieces of good news. First, there will be a time when all of the evil we see in the world will be destroyed. Second, there will be a time when all sin will be rooted out of the kingdom of God. All of it! So that means that all of the sins we have committed, and can't seem to stop committing. All of the unkind, mean spirited things we have said or done for which we kick ourselves and cringe at how we could ever be so cruel, all of those sins, those ugly weeds will be separated from the child of God, the good hearty wheat that we are and we will be utterly free of sin and evil! No more crying, no more berating ourselves, no more berating our neighbor. Yipee! But until that time we have to be patient and suffer through the evil of the world with Jesus help. As St. Paul says, “I consider that the suffering of this present time is not

worth comparing to our future glory.” God is patiently waiting until harvest time because he doesn’t want to destroy the good wheat.

God wants to make sure that in destroying the sinner he doesn’t destroy the saint. He wants to make sure that in destroying the weeds he doesn’t also destroy any of the good wheat he planted.