

“Let It Be”

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

The St. Louis Cardinals didn't win the World Series last year - or the year before. They weren't even in the World Series. But manager Tony La Russa, who has four World Series rings, is a lock for a future first-ballot pass to Cooperstown.

But according to a magazine article I recently read in a surgery waiting room; in 2009, La Russa was mad. He wasn't yelling at the home-plate or first-base umpire, but he was yelling in court. He filed suit against Twitter for allowing someone to "twitterjack" his name - which, for a high-profile celebrity - is sort of like his brand. Someone other than himself had created a Twitter account in his name and said some really nasty things about some Cardinals players. La Russa was not amused.

Apparently, Twitterjacking isn't hard to do. If you don't have a Twitter account, anyone can use your name and start tweeting to beat the band, and those who follow your "name" will think it's you doing the tweeting. So we don't know who the twitter pretenders are.

Or, to put this in the language of Jesus, we're going to have to put up with the weeds among the wheat, the false among the true, the fake among the genuine. In this case – our text for today – is there anything we can do about the fakes, the Twitterjackers, the phonies, the weeds?

If you've ever looked across a field of wheat, you know you can see some weeds quite clearly while other weeds look very much like the wheat. Getting rid of weeds is never easy or cheap. Jesus' remarkable advice for dealing with weeds is to let them be. Let it be.

We farmers and gardeners raise our eyebrows because we know that not pulling out weeds is no way to run a farm or a garden. We know that such neglect insures two undesirable results.

First, it contributes to the choking out of the good plants. Second, it guarantees a bumper crop of unwanted weed seeds to plague next years planting. Maybe the parable ignores these truths in order to make its theological point. Or maybe Jesus just was not as good a gardener as he was a carpenter when he talks about building houses on proper foundations. In any case, his real trade was Messiah-ing, about which he wrote the book.

Jesus begins the parable of the Weeds with “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in the field . . .”

Jesus is setting himself up as the farmer doing the sowing. And the “good seed” he is sowing is a translation of two Greek words, “Kalon sperma”, which motivated me to look in my concordance to see where else these Words are used in our New Testament. There are 40 occurrences of the word “sperma”. In the old days it was common practice to English all 40 of them with the word “seed.” But only four times, twice in this parable of the weeds and twice in the parable of the mustard seed, does “sperma” refer to the actual thing planted. The rest of the time it is used to refer to the progeny or the descendents that come from seed. “Sperma Abraham” or the seed of Abraham is the most common citation that obviously refers to his descendents – that is, to what grows from the seed rather than to the seed itself.

It seems to me that the Greek word “sperma” even here in the parable of the weeds is referring more to what has grown up as a result of the sowing of the seed rather than what was planted to begin with. And so the good seed, he says, are the “children of the kingdom” whose lives are the flowering of what Jesus has sown.

On the other hand in verse 25, “while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.” The enemy came and “twitterjacked” the wheat

field. Jesus explains what happened in verses 38-39: “the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.” So in English we hear “he’s bad seed” or “she’s a bad apple” referring not only to a person’s origin but also to a person’s character and actions.

The good news in verse 38 is that “the field is the world.” When Jesus sees the world, he looks out across not a field of weeds in which there is wheat growing, but a field of wheat in which there are weeds growing.

This should be encouraging news to us Christians. Sometimes its easy to get discouraged and believe that evil is all around us, about to overwhelm us. But in this parable, Jesus reminds us that there are more of the faithful, more of us who have not bowed the knee to Baal, more of us whose core values are biblical ones, than we sometimes realize. Yes, the “children of evil” exist and they do damage to the crop, but they exist in a field, in a world that is predominantly a field of wheat, a world of “children of the kingdom.”

But when I read this parable and really think about and apply it to my 26 years of pasturing; I’m very hesitant to make it this black and white, to divide us into “children of the kingdom” and “children of the evil one,” weeds and wheat, good seed and bad seed, good and evil.

My experience tells me that good and evil, weeds and wheat not only inhabit the same field but inhabit the same individual human beings. 1500 years after this parable was spoken, Martin Luther said we are at the same time saint and sinner, good and evil.

Which I think explains why so many of us are in such a hurry to go out into the field and judge which is wheat and which is weeds. We want to keep busy judging others, pulling up those weeds; so that we don’t have to confess the evil in us, so that we don’t have to admit the bad seed in us. So if you agree with Martin Luther and me, that we are simultaneously good and evil, saint

and sinner; then the only result of a truly dedicated campaign to get rid of evil will be the abolition of literally everybody.

I think that puts the finger on the whole purpose of the enemy's sowing of the weeds. He has no power against goodness in and of itself: the wheat is in the field, the kingdom is in the world, and there isn't a thing he can do about any of it. So he tries to wreak havoc in the world by trying to sucker us, the forces of goodness in the world, the followers of Christ, into taking up arms against the confusion he has introduced. He gets us to go out and do his work. He gets us to go out and judge one another. He gets us to go out in self-righteousness to pull up those evil people. He simply sprinkles around a generous helping of darkness and waits for the children of light to get flustered enough to do the job for him.

So we come to the farmer, we come to God totally preoccupied with the problem of evil. In verse 27, we come to the farmer and ask, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?"

Or, to put it another way, "Why does God allow all these terrible things to happen?" Or, put another way, "If God is good, brilliant, clever, loving, and anything else you'd like to mention, then why does he have enemies who make a whole lot of trouble? And since God does have enemies who cause terrible things to happen, then our helping him to eliminate those enemies helps us out in our quest for salvation.

So in verse 28, we are eager to volunteer to go out and pull up the weeds. "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 bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

The Greek word for “let” as in “let both of them grow together” is “Aphete” which can be translated to “let go, leave, permit,” or as its translated when Mary learns that she’s pregnant with Jesus – “let it be with me according to your word.” “Let it be.”

Another form of “aphete” is the Greek word “Aphéo” which is translated as “forgive” in our Lord’s Prayer. “Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us.” Let our sins be. Let all the sin, the malice, the evil, the badness that is in the real world and in the lives of real people not be dealt with by attacking or abolishing the things or persons in whom it dwells. Rather, evil is dealt with by simply “letting it be” and even forgiving it when the opportunity arises.

But pastor, if you simply tell people in advance that they’re going to be forgiven, won’t they just go straight out and take that as permission to sin? Don’t we have to keep them scared out of their wits by at least threatening to judge them?

To which I respond, “Jesus died on the cross instead of mocking his enemies.” Even from the cross, Jesus loved us. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Let it be.

Jesus on the cross doesn’t threaten his enemies. He forgives them. He forgives us. “Aphes,” he says, one last time. Let it be.

Sermon - #478 – Father, We Thank You.

Recessional - #550 – On What Has Now Been Sown.