

Being Stuck in the Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

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According to Rev. Charles Yoost there is a well-known saying in rural areas in the late summer. The saying is this: "Make sure you lock your car doors when you go into church."

I grew up in inner city Chicago and later in the Chicagoland area. We were often told to lock our cars even in church parking lots because something might be stolen, perhaps even the car itself.

But according to pastor Yoost there's an entirely different reason in rural areas. It's just that when you come out of worship in rural areas, if you have unwittingly left your car unlocked in the late summer, you might find a bag of zucchini in the front seat! Zucchini is a very healthy food, but there's nothing that grows more abundantly than zucchini--so gardeners are constantly giving zucchini to anyone who will take them. (1)

I thought of the abundance of zucchini when I read again this week Jesus' parable about weeds. If there is anything that grows more abundantly than zucchini, it might be weeds. Especially if you are trying to grow a garden. Believe me I am not much of a gardener, but even I can't really screw up growing zucchinis.

Every farmer and gardener knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds. If you don't, the weeds will choke out the good plants you want to grow. (Do you remember the parable of the sower?) God also knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds. Many of us are uncomfortable with the idea of a God of Judgment, but sooner or later we have to answer the question: What about the weeds? What are the weeds in your life that keep us stuck and lost?

For many it is the weeds of: Doubt and despair, Worry and anxiety, Guilt and shame, Unresolved animosity or sin.

We don't have to walk far from our televisions or news apps on our devices to see humanity lost in the weeds. Human evil is a continuing reality in our world. We see it on every continent and we sometimes see it in our own communities. We recoil at the idea of the judgment of God, but what about the weeds? What about the evil within the hearts of men and women--the wars, hatred, bigotry, envy, bitterness, lust, anger, greed, etc.

Now we may not be responsible for what others do with their lives or the self serving choices made in the halls of power. But we are responsible for our own lives. So again, what about the weeds in our lives? How do we deal with those weeds--those pesky personality defects, those murky moral letdowns, those tawdry times of ethical failure that keep us from being all that God intends us to be?

In the imaginings of the Great Gardener our Lord has created us to be like a beautiful garden--bearing fruit whose taste is sweet and pleasing to the taste buds and bursting forth in blossoms whose beauty is pleasing to the eye.

How do we get rid of the weeds from our own hearts and become the beautiful garden Christ intends us to be? Gardening isn't my forte' but there have been things I have learned from others.

The first step is to recognize how weeds grow.

They grow without any effort on our part. No one goes out and plants a weed. No one cultivates it, waters it, sees that it gets enough sunshine. Weeds require no labor.

There is a little poem that describes how many of us feel about gardening. It goes something like this: "To cultivate a garden takes a lot of labor; I would rather live next door to a gardener and cultivate my neighbor."

Weeds require no labor. They just appear.

Weeds remind me of that mindless bit of philosophy still so popular in our society today: "If it feels good, do it." "If saying something horrible to another furthers your agenda, say it" "If sacrificing your values for a short-term gain is justifiable do it"! That is a certain recipe for failure. If we did only what felt good or expedient to us we would be physical, mental, moral and spiritual wrecks. The things worth having in life require effort, and sometimes, pain. And it means taking time to dig out our weeds.

You get rid of weeds by recognizing what it takes to grow a beautiful garden-- you begin with a mental idea of what you hope to achieve.

Many gardeners and farmers believe that it is important to map out their gardens and fields in their mind's eye. They visualize the finished product--the roses and the begonias, the dogwoods and the maples, the corn, wheat, and soybeans, the hedges and the walkways.

Do you have that same clear-cut vision concerning your life? There are some people who take better care of their lawns than they do their lives. Successful people almost always have a vision of what they hope to achieve in life.

There is a story's told of a skinny, scrawny youngster who one day heard a coach say, "You can be what you make up your mind to be. God will help you."

Later this youngster told the coach, "I've decided what I want to be--the fastest man in the world."

The coach said, "Son, that's a great dream but there is one problem. Dreams have a way of floating high in the sky and drifting around like clouds. A dream never becomes a reality unless you have the courage to build a ladder to your dream." He explained that his dream would take determination, dedication and discipline.

Young Jesse Owens listened to the words of that coach and at the 1936 Olympics in Germany he established himself as the fastest man in the world. He won four gold medals and embarrassed Adolph Hitler before the world.

A beautiful garden begins with a vision, a dream, an inner picture of what you can accomplish with God's help.

Finally, a beautiful garden requires a vision, a plan and a commitment to cultivate it as long as necessary.

I like what Tom Landry, the legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys once said. It went something like this: "I have a job to do that is not very complicated, but it is difficult: to get a group of men to do what they don't want to do so they can achieve the one thing they have wanted all of their lives."

Isn't that a great statement? Cultivating a garden requires those daily little tasks that are sometimes hard and painful. But you do them because you can envision the beauty and the bounty that awaits you. That, of course, is what disciplined living is all about. Some people do not understand the nature of discipline. They think of it as mindless devotion to meaningless activity. However, discipline allows a person to prioritize what is import in his /hers lives.

How are you bringing discipline into your Christian walk?

Isn't it time you got rid of the weeds in your life? Weeds are the enemy of a beautiful garden--whether that garden is a good marriage, or the sanctity of your body, or your relationship with your children, or your progress in your profession, or your relationship with God.

So heed Jesus' warnings about weeds. Keep the weeds out of your life.

God loves us so much that He does not want anything in our lives that might drag us down and take away our joy. Successful living requires us to get rid of the weeds and to turn our lives into a beautiful garden.