

Christ Church, Dartmouth
Sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Kyle Wagner
July 19, 2020

Last Sunday, our gospel from Matthew talked about scattering seeds, and that not all seeds grow where they are planted. This week, Matthew picks up the story of God's creation, and Jesus begins to look at the obstacles that may hold us back, those weeds as he says, which get in the way. Except for the weeds that Jesus talks about in his parable aren't in the soil naturally.

Jesus tells us a story about the nature of evil. About how a landowner planted good seed in his field, only to have an enemy come and plant weeds in the middle of the night. The landowner debates whether to weed the land, but he tells his workers, "No, don't touch them. Let the weeds and the wheat grow together. If you take out the weeds, all will be lost. When its harvest time, separate the growth, and burn the weeds, and keep the wheat.

Jesus is talking about good and evil, coexisting in the world. We know what the burning fire is referring too, not a nice place. But in many ways, we live in both the weeds and the wheat. There are days when we are growing weeds and days when the harvest is good. These days, it seems that the weeds are overtaking our fields. Racism, bigotry, sexism, poor leadership, misinformation about the coronavirus. It's hard to know fact from fiction, or is it?

I want to be bold today and challenge us. I want to challenge us as a community, and as a church, because we are in the midst of a field that is changing. The church, right now on July 19th, is radically different than just a few months ago. Today is the first time in months we have gathered, and let's be honest; it's not the same. We know that good growth needs sunlight, rain, and fertile ground. Worship is like that too. We need good prayers, good words, good music. But we find ourselves in a place where we can't really sing, a place where communion is be passed with surgical gloves on. We find ourselves in a place where we feel hopeless. Please know that as your Rector, feel these emotions too. We feel that the weeds are taking over.

Our history here at Christ Church is deep, and we have gotten through many tough times. We are a resilient people. Right now, we are in a fragile place because of COVID-19. As a community, many difficult decisions have had to be made, ones that we find challenging. And we may need to make more tough choices. But right now, the choices, the quick changes we are doing are in the hope that we can get back to where we were before COVID-19. And you know what? This gives me hope. I know if any group could grow from a soil that seems weedy, it's the people of Christ Church, Dartmouth. I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever.

Before COVID hit, we as a community decided to embark on a journey of discernment of where God is calling us. What is our mission? What ministry do we want to expand or embark upon? What are the resources that will allow us to plant and sow seeds?

When COVID hit, I think many of us were saying; this is serious, what road are we being given? The other day in our Alpha study, someone said that sometimes they felt like God was hitting them over the head. I've felt this before too. I think that God is doing this to the church right now. I believe God is saying, look, you've talked about these things before. You know it's going

to be difficult, but the world is changing, the way of doing church is not the same, you need to hurry up. We often hear the phrase “In God’s Time.” Folks, God’s time is not slow; it’s fast, it’s dynamic; it’s radical.

And when we feel that things are going too fast, when we feel that maybe this isn’t the time, we might be failing to see something. When we fail to see hope in the chaos we face, we hear the words God speaks through the Psalmist:

Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting places and are acquainted with all my ways. Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me.

And then we have God inspiring Saint Paul who writes: We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation but we, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

I’d like to end with a story today and then ask a question. The story is called “The Weight of the Glass”

Once upon a time a psychology professor walked around on a stage while teaching stress management principles to an auditorium filled with students. As she raised a glass of water, everyone expected they’d be asked the typical “glass half empty or glass half full” question. Instead, with a smile on her face, the professor asked, “How heavy is this glass of water I’m holding?”

Students shouted out answers ranging from eight ounces to a couple pounds.

She replied, “From my perspective, the absolute weight of this glass doesn’t matter. It all depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute or two, it’s fairly light. If I hold it for an hour straight, its weight might make my arm ache a little. If I hold it for a day straight, my arm will likely cramp up and feel completely numb and paralyzed, forcing me to drop the glass to the floor. In each case, the weight of the glass doesn’t change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it feels to me.”

As the class shook their heads in agreement, she continued, “Your stresses and worries in life are very much like this glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and you begin to ache a little. Think about them all day long, and you will feel completely numb and paralyzed – incapable of doing anything else until you drop them.”

What do we learn from this story? I think that when weeds take root, we recognize them. We recognize the times when we ourselves are the weeds. But we also remember the words of Psalm 139, and we are to place our trust in God. Together we can put our burdens down. The longer we hold onto the past, I think the heavier the glass gets. I think the time for holding the glass has come to an end. I think it’s time to let the living waters flow. It’s time for us a community to really start the journey, a journey that will be hard, a journey of tough questions.

A time when we will be weeds and we will be wheat. When I ask you the next question, I'm being serious. Real serious. Are you ready for this journey? Will you take the first step? That leap of faith. Will you join me on this journey? Companions on an adventure. Companions on a journey! AMEN.