

Year A: Proper 11  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
July 19, 2020

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalm 139:1-9, 12, 23-24  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Romans 8.12-25

What good are dandelions? These perennial weeds spread through the lawn no matter what one does. One breath on a seed pod and all of this year's digging and weeding is more than undone. What good are those pernicious weeds?

Jacob. Jacob is on the run. He has taken his brother's birthright and his brother's blessing by conspiring with his mother Rebekah. Jacob is on the way to his mother's family for protection and to find a wife. He stops in the desert for the night with only a stone for a pillow. What good can come from such a man?

This coming Wednesday is the feast day of Mary of Magdala, long portrayed as a disreputable woman. Even in trying to untangle the number of women named Mary in the New Testament, we still ask: What good could possibly come from Mary Magdalene?

The parable of the wheat and tares makes perfect sense. All of these people, like dandelions, like "tare," are weeds. It is so easy to see. And thank goodness we can

readily identify the weeds around us – because if all of these other people are weeds, why, we most certainly are – you got it, the wheat. It is we who will see God’s kingdom. There will be no “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in our family tree.

Parables. The story of the wheat and the tares is a parable, and even though it was explained to us – odd that these parables are being explained – we remember that parables are not simple stories with only one message. Parables usually tell us something about ourselves. Parables *always* tell us something about God.

The leaves of a dandelion are good to eat. That out of control weed quite easily provides food – leafy greens (healthy!) for families. With little to no effort, there is food literally at our feet. I wonder how many of us have been presented with a bouquet of bright yellow dandelions, already wilting in the clutches of a toddler’s hands? Is that not a precious gift from God’s garden and a child’s heart?

Jacob, alone and unprotected, with no one to trick and no one to rescue him, is not actually alone. Jacob has a stone AND GOD in that desert, and in his vulnerability, Jacob hears from God. God appears not in some far off place, but standing right next to Jacob: “I am Yahweh,” God says, the same God of your ancestors, the God

of your grandfather Abraham. That which I promised him is yours: land and a family, with unimaginable abundance in both things. “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.” Jacob now knows the presence of God in a most personal way. It would appear that God will talk to anyone, will promise abundance to anyone, even to a scoundrel named Jacob.

Mary of Magdala. Mary Magdalene. Far from being a woman of scandal, it is Mary Magdalene who stays with Jesus at the cross. All four gospels write of Mary being present at the empty tomb of Jesus, and in the gospel of John, it is Mary Magdalene who is the first eye-witness to Jesus’ resurrection. The negative stories about her, even if they happen to be true, or not her whole life. Far from being a weed, Mary, in John’s gospel, is Christianity’s first apostle.

So what of the parable of the wheat and the weeds? In such a story there must be both wheat *and* weeds. “Tare” is a specific weed that had a prominent place in ancient culture. Tare it looks very much like a wheat plant, and it grows entwined with the wheat from the roots up. One cannot pull out the tare without also pulling up the wheat, which would ruin the entire crop. It is not until seeds have formed

that one can tell that it is a weed. Let it grow, says the sower; I will sort it out at harvest time. Later. Let it grow.

Weeds generally do not grow in a tiny way, do they? Tare is no exception; it grew with abandon. In our ancient world, tare was good news. At harvest time the tare was gathered into bundles and burned as fire wood. In a place in which firewood is scarce, the sower gives us a use for everything. Everything can be used, even those things that are planted with destruction in mind. The nature of God is that God can make something planted with an intention of destruction be of great use. God's abundance is not thwarted by weeds, deception, or our ill deeds. God will sort out *who and what* is good or evil; the harvester's job is to gather everything up and give it to the sower.

We might recognize that there is wheat and tare in each of us. The good news in the Jacob story of Genesis is not Jacob's faithfulness. The good news is God's faithfulness. God stood next to Jacob before Jacob ever took a step in God's direction. God, not some generic heavenly being, but Yahweh of our ancestors stood next to Jacob and offered him abundance, abundance being what we have when we have nothing left.

Mary thought that she had nothing left after seeing her Lord hanging on that cross.

Mary thought that she had nothing left when she showed up to anoint his body and discovered an empty tomb. In fact, Mary had everything, because God was there before her and with her. God's love is not held back by human opinions. Some called Jesus a glutton and a drunkard; others asked if anything good could come out of Jerusalem. We grossly underestimate what God can do.

Look what God can do! Those things within ourselves that we think have no value – have a use when we bundle them up and give them to God. At an individual level, we are called to do that work. Those parts of ourselves that we think have no value, or that we think are bad: bundle them up and give them in prayer, in words, in action – in whatever way that we can – to God. God will sort out what is tangled within us and show us how to use it for God's will and good purpose. At a corporate (group) level, we are called to do that same work. What good can come from a pandemic? Our worries are prolific, and yet week by week we are together, sometimes in person, sometimes via technology that we might simultaneously dislike and adore ... because we are together. Together in Christ, wherever we may be as a faith community.

We are called to look for the good that can come out of this pandemic, the good that is already present, however much our situation looks like it is tangled up in an aggressive weed. God will sort everything out when we turn ourselves over to God's love and care.

God who searches us and knows us,  
God who knows when we sit down and when we rise up, God who discerns our thoughts from far away, and is acquainted with all of our ways,  
Will not abandon (and has not abandoned) this community, the world, or us.

Yes, something good can come out of Jerusalem, a lonely desert ... and even a pandemic. God the shower will show us what is wheat and what is tare. Our task is to gather the harvest, to pull it into the light and see that its roots are love.

Amen.