

Views from the Pews – The Parable of the Weeds

The Parable of the Weeds is another of Jesus' simple stories derived from common agricultural scenes familiar to his hearers. Like the parable of the Sower, this story is also guaranteed to prompt weary recognition of the way we have constantly to fight against nature doing its own thing. Who has not spent long hours of effort trying to defend their gardens from the armies of weeds that come up along with the good plants? Yes, the curse that followed Adam's eviction from Eden has been with us ever since.

In the parable, the farmer (God) has a field which stands for the whole world. The seed represents the natural vigour of creation, and its capacity to grow and multiply as God commanded, quite independently of human will. The weeds are identified as darnel, an annual grass that has long, slender bristles very much like real wheat. The visual similarity between wheat and weeds means that the two are easily confused.

The apparently simple statement that "while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away" (v. 25) has some important implications. First, the servants could sleep, assuming the crop would grow without their help. Second, the enemy had no power to prevent the crop from growing, but did not need to if he could persuade the servants to damage the crop in the process of attacking the weeds. Well meaning strong-arm methods employed by the righteous can easily do all the evil that the enemy intended. So when the servants ask the farmer if they should go out and pull up the weeds, the farmer tells them to "Let both of them grow together until the harvest" (v. 30). This, as all country people know, is no way to run a farm.

The farmer's command implies tolerance of evil, a counter-intuitive idea that seems to grant permission for every kind of human calamity to proceed uncontested. But in *Parables of Judgement*, Robert Farar Capon points out that the original Greek wording for 'letting be' also implies forgiveness. On the basis of Jesus' ministry as lived and died, God has announced that the end-of-time forgiveness will be universal; no-one is going to be condemned. Jesus on the cross forgave his enemies unconditionally, and returned to heaven complete with the scars recording his victory over the worst that evil men could do to him.

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