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Weeds

Paul Dean

I grew up swimming in swimming pools. Nice, chlorine maintained, clear water. Swimming pools. Then for some reason, God called me up out of central Texas to this - at the time - weird place called Minnesota, to a bible camp. And no, the bible camp didn't have a swimming pool. It was on a lake. And it was a beautiful lake. Crisp cold water. But it also had areas where there were weeds. Some places were a bit weedy. I remember swimming through a weedy area for the first time and it was not a pleasant experience. The weeds, grabbing at me... to be honest... it freaked me out. And from that moment on I have tried to avoid weedy areas. However weedy areas are not confined to lakes. Have you ever been around weedy people or situations. Grabbing at you, making you feel uncomfortable or wounding you in some way? Have you ever been weedy? Hard to be around, grabbing at others, wounding others?

I also grew up in an agricultural community and we knew what to do with weeds. Weeding was simply a part of life. You quickly came to understand that there was "good seed" and there was "bad seed". You also came to understand that people not only used good and bad to describe seeds, but they used "good seed" and "bad seed" to describe other people. Typically, people were labeled as "bad seed", those weedy ones, early on in their lives. In my small town you knew who the "bad seed", who the weedy were. Once you had that label - it was extremely hard to get rid of. And by the way it was never me. Right?

But I remember the first time the kingdom of God pushed back on my notion of labeling someone a "bad seed", one of the weedy ones. At that same bible camp, depending on the week, it was my duty to watch over 14 or so elementary or Jr High boys. Keep them safe.

Make sure they were where they needed to be when they needed to be there. Lead them spiritually during the week through devotions, bible studies, etc.

Then there was the week of Lucas. Huge troublemaker... always late... always causing problems... always loud... you know, slightly weedy. So, I was not surprised that on Thursday night - the last night of camp - Lucas ran away. I am out in the darkness, in the woods, searching for Lucas... yelling his name... other camp staff are scouring the camp too and as I come back in from the trails, exasperated... upset... frustrated... angry... bitten up by mosquitoes, everything in me is judging this kid as a weed. And then I get word that they have found him, and he is back in the cabin waiting. With a full head of steam... yes... a full head of steam, filled with righteous purpose, I make my way to the cabin. But outside the cabin, waiting for me, is the camp director. He stops me... assess the situation... and asks me a simple question... "So, what are you going to say?"

What do you mean what am I going to say? Can't you see what I am going to say? I'm mad... I'm angry... it's been a horrible week with this "weed." I've tried my best all week but now he's going to hear about how angry, how frustrated I am, and how weedy he really is.

But before I said any of that to the director... he looked at me, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Lucas is a foster kid. He gets shipped from house to house and he was shipped here for the week. A social worker dropped him off. This might be the one and only place in his life right now where he can feel loved and accepted". And then he walked away.

Matthew 13:24-30

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then

went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 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 in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

See... right there in scripture – there is “good seed” and “bad seed”. Vindicated... but wait, let’s see what Jesus is actually saying. First this is a parable of what the kingdom of God is like. Not what the kingdom of earth is like or the kingdom of me or the kingdom of you is like. First and foremost, this is a parable of what the kingdom of God is like.

So, we should check all our preconceived notions at the door. And get ready... to hear something that we may not like ... because we typically don’t like other people’s kingdoms... we like our own kingdoms... In other people’s kingdoms we don’t get to make the rules... and we don’t like that.

And by the way, how bad of a gardener is Jesus? Let the weeds grow up with the good plants? Stick with the carpentry deal Jesus. You are way out of your league here. However, Jesus’ real trade craft was being the Messiah – which well... he is pretty good at.

The weed that Jesus uses as his example is a weed called “darnel.” It’s a weed that, in the beginning of its growth looks very similar to the wheat plant. However, as it grows it will show itself for what it is, a poisonous weed that will ruin the crop. As it grows, its roots will intertwine with the roots of the wheat and basically become one with wheat. Once that happens, you’d have to burn the whole deal.

Harvest... gone. So here we have the poisonous intertwined with the good and God lets it happen? What is going on?!

And where did the weeds come from anyway? The field workers express total surprise, *'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?'*

One reality of an agricultural society is that people, especially driven by revenge, anger, hate, all kinds of the bad stuff... can be very weedy and sabotage one another. Roman law made it a crime to sow the darnel weed in another person field. In their weediness they were literally spreading poison and you better not threaten the Roman harvest. Another way to put it... do not mess with the kingdom of Rome.

But why is the weed allowed to exist, threatening, messing with the kingdom of God. It’s because the kingdom of God is not made up of two different groups of people. That’s super weird for us. You and I see the world in two ways... good or bad. Good seed or bad seed. Wheat or weeds. The kingdom of those who are in and those who are out. But God in Jesus Christ is building a different kingdom.

God knows that the weed of anger, hate, discord – all the bad stuff... will grip all of us at the root of who we are and can poison us too. We can all be a bit weedy. Sometimes, very weedy. The Apostle Paul tries to bring his own struggle into focus. *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* -Romans 7:15

This is not a story about the weeds, the poison in others. This is a story of the poison in us. The weedy parts of you and me. Now... in the explanation of this parable Jesus does talk about judgement for evildoers but that judgement is up to God not us. God directs the harvest. God decides. And I am thankful for that. But the explanation of this parable also

tells us that God will come and remove, take out all that makes us weedy. God will remove our sin that makes us all weedy at times. And thank God, that God directs the harvest. God does what only God can do.

Romans 5:6-8: *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

And there it is... the outrageous good news we call the gospel... Christ doesn't just die for the wheat, but Christ dies for us, even in our weediness.

So... what are you going to say? Those words still ring in my heart to this day. 33 years later. What are you going to say? I walked into that cabin so desperate to live into my kingdom... so filled with my kingdom... so ready with the "weed" label. So ready to treat Lucas like the weed he was. But all of that judgement melted away, burned up in a fire of God's grace, when I saw that frightened little kid, surrounded by his cabin mates, who was ready for, even expecting, my righteous kingdom judgment. Who's the weed now?

The kingdom of God is like... The kingdom of God is like a frightened, discarded little kid, who was treated like a weed his whole life, who ran away because he knew that the next day he was going to return to a really weedy reality, who in that moment gets loved into God's kingdom through the biggest hug he'd probably had in years. Same for this weedy guy as well.

The kingdom of God is near, even in our weediness. So, what are you going to say?