

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year A July 20, 2014

Theme: Damn Weeds

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A mistranslation of today's Gospel passage makes it nearly impossible for us to appreciate Jesus' parable.

The word in Greek given to us as the generic "weeds" is in the actual parable a specific weed, namely "bearded darnel."

Now the translator probably figured that most of us would have no idea what "bearded darnel" was and he or she would no doubt have been correct.

Yet this specific weed is a critical clue to the parable.

"Bearded darnel" looks almost exactly like wheat at every stage of growth except the final produce, and even there is pretty close.

As it grows in the field, a farmer or his helps would have to look very closely to distinguish this particular weed from the wheat.

What's more, as "bearded darnel" grows its pernicious roots are especially long and tend to curl themselves around other roots – wheat – so if you try to pull them out they take the wheat with them.

And most destructive of all, the grains of "bearded darnel" are highly toxic, poisonous, to humans and animals.

Knowing these are not just any old weeds, we can see why an "enemy" would sow "bearded darnel" in the field of one he did not like.

Also we can see why the farmer had little choice but to leave the wheat and the weeds to grow together until harvest when they would be carefully separated.

Now perhaps the parable could speak to the way good and evil reside within each of us at the same time:

we want to do the right and good thing but we often find ourselves choosing or allowing ourselves to get sucked into the wrong or evil thing we don't want to do.

For Matthew's early church community, the parable may have addressed the influx of new and foreign ideas that some in the community found offensive and evil.

The parable perhaps spoke to the need to allow growth and development to see if the final produce was wheat or bearded darnel.

Perhaps this was like Jesus' saying: **"By their fruits you will know them."**

Jesus introduced the parable by saying **"The Kingdom of God is like a man who sowed good seed in his field."**

This Kingdom of God reference would seem to imply a more universal or across the board application of the parable.

In other words, the parable would seem to address the way God's vision of the world is.

Thus, when we look at our own world we see its field increasingly filled with what appear to be troublesome weeds and less and less wheat.

Some among us have become quite bitter and angry at government, at the church, at corporations and businesses, even at charities and non-profits claiming that virtually all institutions of society are corrupt and dishonest.

Similarly, we can write off certain people as "weeds" because they hold certain political or moral or religious positions that are different than our own.

She believes this about same sex marriage so she's go to be a weed.

He believes that about abortion so he's clearly wheat.

They hold this about immigration so he must really be a weed.

They never go to church so they can't possibly be wheat.

The parable reminds us to be careful about our judgments because on harvest day in the Kingdom of God there could be a few surprises.

We may be surprised who's the wheat and who is just "bearded darnel."