

ST. ANDREWS - JULY 23, 2017

I am not a gardener...we have lovely gardens and they are all due to the hard work of my husband Richard. When we lived in Bowmanville we had an interlocking brick driveway. One day we were walking down the driveway and I spotted a weed. I thought I would help out and bent down and plucked it out with great satisfaction. A voice behind me quietly said “you didn’t just pull that did you”? I could tell from the way he worded that and the tone in his voice that this *may* have been a mistake. I turned around and said “um, yes”. “I have been nurturing that.... it’s an evening primrose...it only blooms at night”. My response (perhaps a little defensively) was “well, what kind of a flower only blooms at night? What’s the sense in that? No one will ever see it to appreciate it?” This is a parable according to Lynn...a parable is a story... story that can have several layers - several meanings - we may all hear the same story but we do not “hear” it the same way.

For me this true story is a wonderful metaphor for you...the people in the church...some of you are evening primroses...you do your best work quietly - no fanfare - no marching bands - you work in the kitchen...you visit those in need...you help out wherever and whenever it is needed... but you don’t need nor do you want recognition. And then there are those of us who prefer to blossom in the daytime where we can be seen...there is no right or wrong...there is just different.

Last weeks lectionary was the beginning of Jesus telling his parables....It was a day of story telling for him....he began by sitting on the beach.....in no time a crowd gathered and so he moved to the boat - eventually pushing it away from the shoreline slightly so that he could see the people gathered and they could see and hear him speak. And he does...he tells them a story - the story of the farmer sowing the seed and it falling on different spaces. After he told that story he then went into our lectionary story today...the story of the farmer planting pure seed but having it overcome by weeds.

Anna Carter Florence, a professor of preaching at the Columbia Theological centre (and my hero I might add) has said about this parable “...have you ever noticed that Jesus, a city boy tells a lot of stories about farming ? It is interesting that he would use farming as a metaphor for his stories...why not carpentry?... but carpenters don’t have to *use* farming tools they just have to make them, and just because Jesus has never set his hand to the plow doesn’t mean he can’t preach a great sermon about it.

And so today we have the farmer who plants ‘pure’ seed. If done properly and with great care it can be rewarding work.

I saw this first hand through my stepfather who came into my life when I was 35. Andy Pidgeon was one of those men who you would call the “salt of the earth”. He was a hard worker, gentle, a no - nonsense kind

of guy. He had a large amount of land in Port Hope and for many years (before I knew him) he had a market garden. He grew all kinds of vegetables and would sell them to grocery stores and local markets. Andy had a rough life - being the bread winner of the family from an early age after his father suffered an accident at work - long before worker's compensation. He had very little formal education but was current, sharp as a tack and at times he had a little bit of Archie Bunker in him.

By the time Andy came into my life he had sold off most of his land and now had a small greenhouse where he grew flowers to sell and a vegetable garden for his use.

I always knew when spring was around the corner when, what seemed like the dead of winter, I would go into the house and Andy would be pouring over the seed catalogues...it was time to clean up the greenhouse and make sure that everything was ready for the arrival of the seeds - it was a time of preparation and it was an exciting time for Andy Pidgeon.

When all was ready the planting would begin. Painstaking work of putting seeds into the clean soil in their containers...this would take many days. Tending the greenhouse to make sure that it wouldn't get too hot or too cold in weather that was forever changing at that time of year - the plants depended on Andy for their survival...enough heat,,enough light...enough water....enough tender loving care in order to survive. When I would visit, Andy would take me out to the

greenhouse (a little kick to his step) to see the first shoots coming up through the soil, for although he had tended these seeds, seeing that life spring up from the soil was affirming for him.

I can only imagine how Andy would have felt if one day he walked into his greenhouse to find it vandalized...his hard work ruined.

How does our farmer feel today...he has planted and watched...nurtured and tended his field of what he thought was pure seed only to find that in the dead of night someone came in and planted weeds.

. What to do now. He made a decision.... Let both grow together for if we try to remove the bad now we will affect the good - we will deal with it at harvest time. We will gather the weeds first and burn them and then we will gather the wheat. A job that will now take twice as long and probably not produce the yield it would have. But he came up with a solution. Let the wheat and the seeds grow together....for at this point we cannot tell them apart.

So what lesson can we take from this parable for our life today?

The first lesson is simply this: The Kingdom of God is a mixed bag in which wheat and weeds grow together, side by side, and you can't always tell them apart.

and the second lesson is:

that none of us is ever completely a saint or a sinner but a combination of both. To quote Mr. Rogers "have you ever noticed that the very same

people who are bad sometimes are the very same people who are good sometimes?”

But sometimes we tend to focus on the bad...we decide for ourselves who is worthy and who is not. Who is good - who is bad - who is in - who is out. Author C.S. Lewis in one of his books calls this “a critical spirit” A spirit of judgementalism.

Matthew Chapter 7 Verse 1 says Don't judge so that you won't be judged...for with whatever judgment you judge you will be judged... a mouthful...but if I read it from Eugene Peterson's the message which uses more contemporary language it says...

“Don't pick on people...jump on their failures; criticize their faults - unless of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging.”

Sometimes we just need to tend our own gardens without worrying about our neighbours weeds. There was a story I read this week that I would like to share

A lady went to her Pastor and said “Pastor, I won't be going to your church anymore.” The Pastor responded “But why?” The lady said “Ah! I saw a woman gossiping about another member; a man that is a hypocrite; the worship team living wrong; people looking at their phone during service; among so many other things wrong in your church.” The Pastor replied “OK. But before you go, do me a favour: take a full glass of water and walk around the church three times without spilling a drop on the ground. Afterwards, leave the church if you desire.” The lady thought: too easy! She walked three times around the church as the Pastor had asked. When she finished she told the Pastor she was ready to leave.

The Pastor said, “Before you leave I want to ask you one more question. When you were walking around the church, did you see anyone gossiping?” The lady replied “No.” “Did you see any hypocrites?” The lady said “No.” “Anyone looking at their phone?” “No.” “You know why?” “No.”

“You were focused on the glass, to make sure you didn't stumble and spill any water. It's the same with our life. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, we don't have time to see the mistakes of others. We will reach out a helping hand to them and concentrate on our own walk with the Lord.”

So let me finish by saying that if you see me walking around your church with a full glass of water know that “the preacher preaches what they most need to learn”

.....and for this I say “thanks be to God”