

**FERTILIZER**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 9**  
**JULY 23, 2017**  
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**COLLECT OF THE DAY**

Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**ISAIAH 44:6–8**

The Lord, Israel's king and redeemer, the Lord of heavenly forces, says: I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there are no gods. Who is like me? Let them speak up, explain it, and lay it out for me. Who announced long ago what is to be? Let them tell us what is to come.

Don't tremble; have no fear! Didn't I proclaim it? Didn't I inform you long ago? You are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no other rock; I know of none.

**PSALM 86:11–17**

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth;  
knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name.

**I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and glorify your Name for evermore.**

For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the nethermost Pit.

**The arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent men seeks my life;  
they have not set you before their eyes.**

But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

**Turn to me and have mercy upon me; give your strength to your servant;  
and save the child of your handmaid.**

Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed;  
because you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

\*\*\*\*\***TURN ON RECORDER**\*\*\*\*\*

**ROMANS 7:15–25A**

I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right. But now I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it's sin that lives in me. I know that good doesn't live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it.

So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body. I'm a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I'm a slave to God's Law in my mind, but I'm a slave to sin's law in my body.

**MATTHEW 13:24–30,36–43**

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared."

The servants of the landowner came and said to him, 'Master, didn't you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?'

"'An enemy has done this,' he answered.

"The servants said to him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?'

"But the landowner said, 'No, because if you gather the weeds, you'll pull up the wheat along with them. Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvest time I'll say to the harvesters, "First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.'"

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Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

Jesus replied, "The one who plants the good seed is the Human One. The field is the world. And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom. But the weeds are the followers of the evil one. The enemy who planted them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the present age. The harvesters are the angels. Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire, so it will be at the end of the present age. The Human One will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin. He will throw them into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Those who have ears should hear."

Song of the Day: *Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive*

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What's a weed? I'm not talking wacky tobaccy, by the way.

What IS a weed? My mom once said that a weed is ANY plant that is growing where you don't want it to grow, whether it's a dandelion or an orchid, a Brazilian pepper or a palm tree.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Matthew, Jesus' ministry is becoming a weed in the garden of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish religious establishment; the Pharisees already have vowed to destroy him.

Right after this story, Jesus comes into conflict with the people in his home town who don't believe in him in the least. Jesus is facing conflict on every side

Jesus tells this parable to show how HE approaches conflict.

First, he tells us about us, how humanity deals with it.

The first thing we want to do when we are in conflict is to divide the people involved into "Us" and "Them," into good and bad, into wheat and weeds.

The people on our side, of course, are wheat, good and beloved of God.

And those who disagree with us are weeds.

But, who from GOD'S perspective, should be labeled a weed?

In Saturday's paper there was a very disturbing story<sup>1</sup>

of 5 teenagers in Cocoa, Florida, who mocked a man they called a junkie.

They laughed as Jamel Dunn flailed, and slowly drowned, in a retention pond.

They told him it was his own fault, he shouldn't have gotten in there.

Obviously, those teens thought Jamel Dunn, that "junkie," was a weed.

Since the news story broke, though, it's those 5 teens who have been judged to be weeds.

The police chief said their actions were "utterly inhumane and cruel," but . . . NOT illegal.

Both he and the District Attorney have said

there is no duty in civil or criminal law to help someone in trouble.

Perhaps you think I'm going to demand such a law, but I'm not. Why?

Because I would immediately have to sign my own indictment as a weed.

How are those teenagers any different from me . . . from any of us?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/criminal/teens-recorded-drowning-man-and-laughed-but-face-no-charges/2331146>

We Americans are surrounded every single day with people who need help,  
and we don't rescue them; we even consider taking away what they have.

Children are hungry, schools are failing, old people are neglected,  
the mentally ill are ignored, and that's just here in Pinellas County.

In our nation and worldwide, there are desperate refugees, people sold into slavery,  
folks dying for lack of health care, and families in slums you never want to see, let alone live in.

Far from rescuing people in trouble, our culture says  
they shouldn't have gotten themselves in the mess they're in –  
or they're someone else's responsibility. Not our problem.

This is the culture we have built, one where no one has any duty to rescue people in trouble.

We think this is . . . well, it's just normal, everyday, the way it is.

Someone said those teens must have been taught by somebody  
to be that inhumane and cruel . . . and that is definitely true.

But it isn't some demon master in a school for evil that taught them,  
it is this culture that taught them.

In our culture, we have the right to watch horrible violence on TV and in the movies,  
and we call it entertainment. Laughing at violence is what this culture teaches,  
and that's what those teens learned: it's normal, it's everyday, and it's evil.

In our culture, we have the right to make sure WE stay high and dry  
while others flail around looking for some kind of footing to stand on.

Not caring about people who suffer is what this culture teaches,  
and that's what those teens learned: normal, everyday evil.

In our culture, we have the right to harbor personal prejudices and say awful things  
about entire groups of people: anyone of a gender, race or religions that we don't value.

Taunting others and calling them names is what this culture teaches,  
and that's what those teens learned: it's normal, it's everyday, it's evil.

What is the church's role dealing with these evils?

Time and again in history, a favorite way Christians have dealt with it  
is to pull out their Bibles and find verses like the one today in Matthew  
where Jesus says the evil people, the weeds, will get fire, weeping and gnashing teeth.

Saying they just want to be good servants, Christians set up religious systems  
and support civil governments that identify the weeds in the world, finger the evil people,  
and then burn them at the stake, or gas them in ovens, or threaten them into doing  
what their particular doctrinal framework demands.

But, wait, what does Jesus say about who'll do the weeding?

Jesus says he'll send *angels* at the end of the age to free the kingdom evil.

God will send ANGELS to do the reaping, *not* the church, *not* the pastors or the bishops,  
*not* the preachers, *not* the born-again *or* the progressives;  
only the angels of God can be trusted with the work.

So, maybe those of us in church should be very careful about whom we want to label a weed.

Yet, what are we supposed to do, just sit here and put up with the evil weeds? No.

The first role of the church is to get each one of us to see that the field of wheat and weeds  
isn't so much out there, where OTHER people are, as it is in here, in OUR hearts and lives.

When we're being honest with ourselves, we know that.

We know that we're some wheat, and some weed. We are people who sin.

We may even truly want to do what God wants, to be kingdom people,  
but we also know that time and again we can't get it together.

Paul knows himself and us so well when he says he intends to do good, doing what he hates;  
he wants to stop it, but the sin inside him just keeps doing the sin thing.

And the good he wants to, intends to do, just . . . never seems . . . to get . . . done.

Now, if Paul, perhaps the most ardent Christian disciple EVER

knows that he has both wheat and weeds growing in him,

I think we are safe in assuming we each have both of them, too.

The Church's has the extremely difficult job of teaching us all true repentance,

of helping each of us to find the courage to tell ourselves the truth about our weeds,  
that they are in fact there, they're in everyone.

We may defend ourselves and say they are normal, everyday, and no big deal,  
but the church is here to firmly show us that what culture teaches us,  
those normal, everyday evils, are choking us out of the life in the Kingdom  
for which God created us.

Like recovery in the 12 steps, repentance isn't a one-moment event;

turning toward the life of the Kingdom is something we need to do over and over and over.

Repentance isn't just about our turning, though. Our repentance into gate of the Kingdom

isn't complete until we utterly trust that God's transforming grace, God's forgiveness, pardon,  
blessing, compassion and mercy are given to us, not because we deserve them,  
but because God is crazy about us.

The second role of the Church is to teach those who are repenting the way of Jesus,

helping our wheat grow in a world full of trouble by fertilizing us with ridiculous amounts  
of God's fertilizer of grace, of forgiveness, pardon, blessing, compassion and mercy.

It's not just for us to keep; we're to spread it on the people around us who need help,  
even if they don't deserve it. Maybe especially on people who don't deserve it!

Jesus gave his life for the world, not because we deserved it, but because God loves us.

The people that Jesus became most angry with were those religious types

who thought they were better than others, that they were wheat,  
and who treated others like noxious weeds.

Jesus said they had it backwards: those who divide and destroy others  
are children of the evil one.

I've certainly had enough religious division and fire; how about you?

The Church should be spreading the fertilizer of grace.

People are eager for the Church to help them grow their wheat, they are eager for grace.

There are billions and billions of people who yearn for the common good.

There was another Florida drowning story this month, from Panama City.<sup>2</sup>

Total strangers at the beach formed a human chain 100 yards out into the surf  
to rescue a family that had been swept out to sea by a rip tide.

Except, this time, no one drowned. All were safely brought home.

In our culture, we have the right to go in the water

even if we're not good swimmers or don't understand the tides.

Watching out for each other, saving people who lose their footing, even if they were foolish,  
is what our Lord does and teaches, and so we do it: we spread grace.

In our culture, we have the right to send jobs overseas, to fire people,

to force them to choose between food, housing and health care.

Giving money and food to people going through a job loss or other crisis  
is what our Lord does and teaches, and so we do it: we spread grace.

This wee little church has given over 1,000 pounds of goods to Dunedin Cares,  
and helped with almost \$13,000 in utility bills in just the last 6 months.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tampabay.com/news/publicsafety/dramatic-rescue-of-family-reminds-beachgoers-of-dangerous-rip-currents/2330073>

In our culture, we have the right to have children even if we can't care well for them all the time.

Taking care of kids whose only fault is that they were born poor  
is what our Lord does and teaches, and so we do it: we spread grace.

That's why we have an altar piled with underwear this morning.<sup>3</sup>

In our culture, we have the right see others as weeds and treat them terribly.

Being gracious, kind, patient, and forgiving, even to weedy people,  
blessing those who curse us and praying for our enemies,

is what our Lord does and teaches, and so we do it: we spread grace.

Being people who both look for and give blessings, even to people who don't deserve it,  
IS the Christian mission.

I'm not saying everyone we come across is a wonderful person.

I'm saying that Christians are called to deal with conflict, not with division,  
but by spreading the fertilizer of grace in ridiculous amounts.

How much? I think the rule of thumb is simple:

we give out as much of that fertilizer as we want God to give to us.

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<sup>3</sup> Parishioners brought in dozens and dozens of packages of underwear for the annual Clothes to Kids "Drop [off] Your Drawers" ingathering for Pinellas County school children.