

## Lessons from the Farm: Weeds and Water Sunday, 8/6/17

**1** Today we continue our worship series entitled “Lessons from the Farm.” God created this earth as a blessed garden and Jesus frequently used illustrations from the farm to teach his disciples about growing spiritually and the practices that helped them become deeply committed Christians. As we continue our series this morning with “Weeds and Water,” I admit that I’m not even a gardener, so my first-hand experience with weeding and watering is mostly limited to tending my one third-acre lawn. Joe Schroeder, on the other hand, is an Apple farmer, so I’ve asked Joe to come and share something about weeds and water. **{Joe Schroeder shares, 2-3 minutes}**

**2** This is Palmer amaranth, a new and pernicious weed problem for Minnesota farmers. An article that appeared in the StarTribune last December offered this description of the problem:

*Federal programs designed to help farmers set aside more habitat for bees and wildlife have produced a dangerous offshoot this year: Some mixes used to plant native grasses and flowers were contaminated with harmful weed seeds that have now been introduced onto hundreds of farms in several Midwestern states, including Minnesota.*

*The weeds include Palmer amaranth, one of the most prolific and devastating weeds in the country for corn, soybeans and other row crops...“It’s probably the most significant agronomic weed that we’ve seen over the last 30 years,” said Tony Cortilet, noxious weed program coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture...*

*The worry is not so much that Palmer is going to take over conservation land, ..but that it’s going to spread into nearby row crops...[A] single female Palmer amaranth plant produces more than 250,000 seeds, grows to a height of 6 to 8 feet and has a woody stem thick enough to damage combine cutter bars and other farm equipment that try to mow it down. “It’s almost chain saw material; it’s that strong,” ... Left untreated, it has taken over fields in southern states in as little as three years...[C]rews working for the state agriculture department used propane torches at five sites in late November and early December to incinerate weeds. That in itself won’t eradicate the weeds,..but it will at least prevent their*

*small, shiny black seeds from falling into soil and sprouting into thousands of plants next spring.*<sup>1</sup>

In our first reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus warned us that some of us were in danger of becoming like the Palmer amaranth plant, only to be separated from God and destroyed at harvest time. In our second reading, Peter addresses the watering we need in our lives to eradicate the weeds of sin. I'm reading from 2Peter chapter 1, beginning with verse 3, in the Message paraphrase.

**{Read 2Peter 1:3-9, MSG}.**

**3** It's interesting that a Google search on "watering and weed growth" won't give you general gardening or farming tips. Instead, it returns links with advice on how much water Marijuana plants require! Please don't try this at home. But perhaps that inadvertent search result can serve as an illustration of Peter's gardening advice. Peter knew that meeting Jesus, receiving the Good News of his salvation, and becoming a Christian wasn't the end of the Christian life. The Christian life requires careful tending to grow to spiritual maturity. Peter was concerned that the Christians he was writing to were in danger of losing their salvation because they were allowing the weeds of sin to choke out the good gift of faith they had received through Jesus Christ.

This looks like a happy plant, doesn't it? Plenty of sunlight, water, fertile soil, and room to grow. As young Christians, we start out with a basic knowledge of who Jesus is and a basic faith in our salvation through him. But there's so much more to the gift if we'll nurture it to maturity. Peter describes an amazing list of Christian virtues, fruit of God's Spirit, that grow in our lives as we carefully weed and water our faith. Notice how these things are all interconnected, growing together like a living thing: Good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love. I love The Message version of these terms. Instead of self-control, Eugene Peterson writes, "alert discipline." Instead of perseverance, he writes "passionate patience." Instead of godliness, "reverent wonder." Don't you long for more moments of reverent wonder in your life? Can you imagine what it would be like to be passionately patient,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.startribune.com/superweed-introduced-in-minnesota-with-conservation-seed-mix>

persevering with God's grace and confidence? The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we can experience all those things. But if we're going to grow up, we have to tend to the water and the weeds.

**4** How many of you know that weeds compete with healthy plants for sunlight, water, nutrients, and physical space? Weeds can harbor insects and disease. Weeds in a crop can contaminate the harvest. Some weeds can even poison livestock. The same is true for our spiritual lives and the weeds of sin. Instead of reciting one of the countless Biblical laundry lists of sin, let's just say that sin is anything that tends to separate us from God, to make us unholy, distant from the image of Jesus.

What can we do to water these Christian virtues that Peter lifts up and discourage the weeds of sin and unholiness in our lives? That's the stuff of much of the Holy Scriptures, but our Church tradition is helpful here. John Wesley recommended what he called the "means of grace," the spiritual practices that tend to fill our lives with God and leave less room for the weeds. Wesley thought of these practices in two broad categories: works of piety and works of mercy. Works of piety include things like prayer, fasting, searching the Scriptures, healthy living, Holy Communion, Baptism, and Christian Conferencing. You're practicing an act of piety by joining your sisters and brothers in Christ today to worship and commune with God at the Lord's Table. Works of piety like reading the Bible often come more naturally to introverts and can sometimes be a struggle for those who have a hard time sitting still. Can you think of ways that you can crowd out some weeds in your life by stretching yourself and trying a new work of piety this week?

Works of mercy include things such as: visiting the sick, visiting those in jail, feeding and clothing those in need, charitable giving, and seeking justice. You're practicing an act of mercy when you volunteer at the food shelf or serve at a Wesley Meal. Works of mercy can be hard for us introverts who are often most comfortable in study by ourselves or with a small group of others. Is there a work of mercy that you could plant this week in your life to leave less room for weeds?

It's easy to get confused and think that by doing these things we're somehow earning our salvation by getting on Jesus' good side. Even John Wesley got confused about that. Remember that any good work that we do is made possible only because of the grace of

Jesus. When we practice acts of piety and mercy, we practice the means of grace, receiving God's grace anew and sharing it with others.

**5** John Ortberg created a modern take on the Christian spiritual Disciplines in his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Some of the disciplines he lists that I especially like include Celebration, Slowing, Confession, Secrecy, and even Suffering. Just about anything in this life can become a spiritual discipline, something that draws us closer to God. Ortberg defines a spiritual discipline as "Any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modelled it."<sup>2</sup> That works well, as long as we always remember that the power to live in Christian virtue comes by receiving more of the Spirit of God, not by trying harder. Ortberg makes still another distinction in his chapter, Training vs Trying, which he describes as a fundamental turning point in his understanding of Spiritual Growth. Here's what he says:

*Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely. This is what the apostle Paul means when he encourages his young protégé Timothy to "train yourself in godliness." This thought also lies behind his advice to the church at Corinth: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."*<sup>3</sup>

Training is a bit of a put-off for me, because I hate exercise. But spiritual disciplines are just that- disciplines. Just like any other discipline, there are days when we engage our disciplines with joy and energy, drawing ever closer to God, and other days when we feel tired and would rather skip the workout. But if we want to live in freedom as Jesus meant us to, we have to be intentional and sacrificial in the choices we make, doing the watering and the weeding to make room for God's Spirit to bear fruit in our lives.

**6** We're going to close our message again with this Welsh Prayer that invites God to grow us to maturity and fruitfulness. As we pray, open your hearts to the prompting of God's Spirit. Is God inviting you to try a new spiritual discipline today?

Please pray with me.

**All: Lord, we would grow with you.**

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<sup>2</sup> John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual disciplines for ordinary people*, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

**7** One: New shoots reaching out, hands stretched upward, like leaves newly formed, soaking up your light and warmth.

**All: Lord, we would grow with you.**

**8** One: In sunshine and rain, in darkness and light, in cold days and summer days, from Springtime to Winter.

**All: Lord, we would grow with you.**

**9** One: And bring forth fruit that is pleasing to you, fed by your living water, giving sustenance to others.

**All: Lord, we would grow with you. Amen.**



# ***Buffalo United Methodist Church***

*...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!*



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