



Worship Resources for *Steeple's Ad Run* – Fall 2008

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Matthew 13:24-30

Rooting Out the Weeds

Jesus told a parable about an enemy who sneaked into a farmer's field and sowed weeds amidst the wheat. Any gardener knows that you usually have to rip out weeds to keep them from choking your plants, but this was not your everyday weed. This weed looked like wheat until harvest time, and its roots intertwined with the roots of the wheat. One could not be pulled out without damaging the other. Jesus taught that the wheat and the weeds should be allowed to grow together (to coexist, as my favorite bumper sticker says), until the time of harvest when the farmer could tell the difference. Then both plants could be put to good use: the wheat could be used for bread, and the weeds as kindling for fires.

Jesus often told stories about weeds. The weeds are commonly interpreted to be the sinners, the bad people, the troublemakers, the unrighteous. The church is assumed to be the farmer whose job it is to separate the wheat from the chaff, the riff from the raff. Church people tend to assume that they are the wheat and "those others" are the weeds, but it isn't always true, is it?

As a mother, I always had a special love for the "bad boys" in our neighborhood. So I cringed to hear myself warn my sons that about their choice of friends. I warned them because I wanted to protect them from the very real threat that they would be judged by association. As my sons have grown up, I have seen the beautiful truth of this parable. Many of the so-called "bad boys" have turned out all right – including one of mine! Yet nearby churches still teach that certain kids and kinds of people should be avoided at all costs. It causes me to wonder: what makes one plant a flower and another a weed? Who gets to decide? The truth is, there is plenty of wheat and weed in all of us. Their roots are intertwined, and at times our most weedy parts may even serve us well.

And what if Jesus wasn't talking about individuals at all? What if he was speaking in a kind of freedom code, just as the old slave spirituals imbedded freedom messages that went unnoticed by the slave masters? Jesus may have been implicitly referring to the Romans as the weeds growing amongst the wheat. This parable may have been a message of freedom for those who "had ears to hear," a message which would go unheard by the Romans. The parable may have offered both a veiled promise and a veiled warning. The promise: that the Roman oppressors would be weeded out, in God's own time and way. The warning: if the people attempted to uproot the Romans with violence, it would only bring them great harm.

There is promise and warning for us as well. The warning: if we bring harm to those we see as weeds, we may irreparably harm ourselves as well. The promise: there is life and life abundant for those who learn and love to coexist. In the end, if there is to be any judgment about who is wheat and who is weed, it is God's -- and God's alone. Amen.