

The disciples said.... "Tell us the about the weeds."

OPENING

Two stories about **banishment**:

→ 1st: A few years back in a baseball game played between the Chicago Cubs and the Washington Nationals, the Nationals successfully stole seven out of seven bases. After the game, the media asked the Cubs catcher about his inability to throw out *any* of the attempted runners before they reached the next base. The catcher responded by then blaming the *pitcher* and *his* slowness to the plate. This rupture of baseball etiquette, combined with the catcher's performance on the field and the media firestorm, were all too much for his employer.

That catcher soon was found playing for the Toronto Blue Jays.¹

→ 2nd: In Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, the king's son Prince Harry (the future King Henry V) is friends with Sir John Falstaff. Instead of spending time preparing to be king, Henry has devoted his life to carousing and living the low life with the decadent, uproarious Falstaff. The whole court and kingdom are worried that Prince Harry won't grow up, that he will always maintain his wild and rambunctious ways. Falstaff worries are in the opposite direction, and so he makes his famous, preemptive plea to the Prince:

*... my good lord; banish (any of our friends) banish Peto,
banish Bardolph, banish Poins: but for sweet Jack
Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff,
valiant Jack Falstaff... old Jack Falstaff,
banish not him thy Harry's company,
banish not him thy Harry's company:
banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.*²

Of course, at the end of the play, the Prince, now King, rejects and indeed banishes him. Falstaff dies soon after, it seems, of a broken heart.

PARABLE

The genius of the moment is that, as the audience...

¹ [Nationals swipe team-record 7 bags off struggling Cub Miguel Montero - ESPN](#)

² *Henry IV, Part 1* (Act 2, Scene 4)

we know that it makes complete sense and it is the appropriate right action to banish Falstaff, and for the Prince to separate himself from his former life.

But we still find ourselves wishing that the banishment did not have to take place.

That's Shakespeare literary gift to us, because our human nature is the opposite, we want to *have* the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff, to get to make the decisions about who is in and who is out.

We hear that in our Gospel reading when the Disciples ask for an explanation of Jesus' parable,

“Explain to us the parable of the weeds.”

they've even already come up with a name for it, giving away what *their* focus is in the story.

Matthew is kind enough to give us an interpretative cheat sheet for this parable, explaining what each aspect corresponds to. In it, Jesus says “The field is the world.”

Thus the parable cautions the reader: To banish one weed, is to banish the world.

Jesus tells the disciples, tells us that we don't quite have the capacity to know the weeds from the good crops. We hear it echoed in Shakespeare verse: to banish one, would be to banish the world.

The stakes, of course, are higher in real life, than in the game of baseball or a play enacted on a stage. The reflex is so often to draw strict boundaries, to declare who you are and who you are not. The urge to banish “the other” is great, particularly when one's physical danger is at stake. But, Jesus, despite the fact that he faced threats from within his group of disciples, Jesus preaches patience and forgiveness.

Jesus advises the disciples to let the weeds grow, that it's not our job to uproot or exile those around them. Comfortingly, this lets us off the hook from dispensing that ultimate judgment. Jesus uplifts the patience of the gardener, those with humility enough to say: “I can't quite tell the difference between these two crops, and so my only possible response is to let them grow side-by-side.”

EVIL

With that in mind, if it were that simple, we all could then go home, but there are still the weeds.

Notice what Jesus says about the weeds, about evil in our lives.

He does not say that “they are an illusion” or that “the weeds are there because of some action that you took... that therefore could be corrected.”

He does not say “that the weeds will be vanquished here in this life.”

Rather, he says about the weeds, and evil itself: “They’re there, the weeds are real.”

In his own words: *An enemy hath done this.*

The lines about “gnashing of teeth” and “burning in fire” are still difficult to read.

But they remind us that what we do here on this earth matters, that in that waiting and watching and wishing for the good seed, that there is a purpose.

But...again... the ultimate judgement is not ours.

At the same time, it’s never a passive attitude, or a moral indifference that the parable advises.

Jesus’s response to the encroaching weeds, is not a pie in the sky: “I am pretending not to see or hear you.” Or a sanctimonious “how dare you?” Rather Jesus asserts to the weeds: “come on in... I’ve got you right where I want you.”

Jesus, in his ministry, gathered saints and sinners alike into his fold, with a particular affinity for the latter—Matthew the Tax Collector, Judas the Betrayer, prostitutes and publicans.

One need look no further than the author of today’s Epistle as evidence of Christ’s ability to turn weeds into bountiful harvest. If not for the freedom of the field, St. Paul would not have been “adopted” into the harvest, and been able to sow so many seeds himself.

CONCLUSION:

I am certain, therefore, that if the former catcher for the Chicago Cubs were a member of this church, a player say on St. Timothy’s softball team, that someone would have put in the extra work on the field with him to become better at throwing

out runners, that someone would have helped him, when he felt threatened and criticized, how to speak truth in love within a community.

Likewise, I am certain that someone from St. Tim's would have helped John Falstaff get treatment in one of our support groups, and to figure out how he could have played some meaningful role as life changed around him.

Beyond that, what advice does this parable have for the church in 2026?

The church is called to recognize and name those harmful forces, either personal or political, at work in the field.

The church is called to be critical and self-aware enough to know that weeds might be within ourselves, and in our own community, and that we might not actually be the good seed.

The church is called to be willing to seek out and embrace seeds and weeds alike in advocacy and fellowship.

That's the church that Jesus calls his followers to be, and that church bears a striking resemblance to the church that I stand in today, and have been a part of these last four+ years.

May we be so bold, that in our hearts and minds, to be conscious of the weeds, within and without, to know them, to have patience with them, and to love them.

AMEN