

Sermon-“Dreams, Weeds, and Wheat; Oh My!”
Christy Henke Ratliff
July 19, 2020
Proper 11
Year A
RCL

Track 1:

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23

Romans 8: 12-25

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

“Search us out, O God, and know our hearts; try us and know our thoughts. See if there is poison within us, and guide us in the way that is eternal.”

I rather like weeds. I’m no gardener, but I appreciate a jumbled flower garden with lots of color, textures, aromas and sizes of the blooms, some of which would most likely be identified as “weed.” I remember when my sons were little and they would gather up a bunch of canary yellow dandelions to proudly present to me. “Dandy lions, Mommy, Dandy lions!” As someone with the proverbial “brown” thumb, I often grow weeds more successfully than cultivated blooms, so for me, it’s a bit of a puzzling scripture, this our gospel reading, until we realize these “weeds” growing with the wheat are not these kinds of weeds. These weeds, tares or darnel, are actual poison. While growing, they appear to be wheat; they are fakers! It’s only once the darnel and the wheat are fully grown and mature that they reveal themselves as counterfeit wheat; in their hubris, they stand up a little too proud while the wheat bows. Then, even a child, and even me, can tell the authentic wheat from the poisonous fake. Its name comes from the latin for “intoxicated” for the intoxicated nausea it causes, sometimes unto death. Again, no ordinary weed; this is literal poison. And it grows with wheat, which for many of us is life-giving nourishment. All the while the wheat and darnel are growing, it’s nearly impossible to tell the difference. We must be **patient** so we do not consume poison when intending to consume nourishment. It takes wheat about 7-8 months, nearly as long as a human pregnancy. Growing babies and growing wheat that grows with a deadly weed is liminal time and space...it’s the inbetween, when the boat has set sail and no shoreline is in sight.

Can you imagine growing twins. And not just any twins but two nations within one womb. We enter Jacob’s narrative this week with his dream about the ladder, but we need a bit of the backstory first. We remember that Rebekah and Isaac became pregnant with twins back in Genesis 25. Rebekah had a rough pregnancy with the children struggling within her, so much so that she went to the Lord and said “If it is to be this way, why do I live?” The Lord told her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.” She carried on, and when the time came, Esau was born first with Jacob gripping his heel. The boys grow up, I get the sense with lots of sibling rivalry. We learn that Esau trades his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup. He was unable to be with his discomfort of hunger. He was not patient, and he forfeited a huge piece of his identity. The story continues and Rebekah, employing some trickery, makes sure

that Father Isaac gives Jacob the blessing typically reserved for the first born, which is Esau. Is God doing something new here? Using a woman AND giving the blessing to the younger son? It gives us pause to wonder. When this happens, Esau is angry, furious, and out of control enraged. This is where our story picks up with Jacob on the road, fleeing his home, and traveling to his Uncle Laban's. He stops for the night, uses a stone for a pillow, and dreams of the ladder. Do you ever wonder why he uses a rock for a pillow? It's almost as if he's intentionally making himself uncomfortable. You see, I think Jacob is grieving, and I wonder if he feels a bit guilty for what has happened with his brother. This is an "ambiguous" grief of fleeing his home and realizing he will likely not see his aged father again. He's in that liminal space between shores. We know all about this, during this time of staying-at-home, social distancing, getting used to wearing masks all while doing the work to dismantle systemic racism. Jacob has left one shore and hasn't arrived at the next. He has no where to turn EXCEPT to the Lord. He has to be patient with his discomfort. He uses a rock for a pillow. I realize he's fled quickly, but surely there is something softer than a rock? My sense is that Jacob is a dervish of emotions, and yet God is steadfast! Through Jacob, God uses that rock to mark the space as sacred. Jacob's the first church planter! God tends to Jacob's grief by giving him the dream of the ladder with many angels ascending and descending. God is turning toward Jacob; God is showing Jacob that they are in relationship. God is with him in his grief and uncertainty. The movement along the ladder shows the movement and fluidity of relationship and the many angels represent community. God and Jacob form a covenant. This ladder and this stone are such gifts to Jacob and to us, despite the discomfort, and maybe because of the discomfort, because we are shown that God is with us in our patience for discomfort.

It's good news! These are our ancestors! Rebekah, Jacob, and the farmers growing the wheat amidst the darnel are our people, and they show us how to be patient with discomfort. They show us how to be in the space between shores. They teach us that patience is not passivity; Rebekah's body does the work of growing those twins, and it's hard! In today's world, she would be on bedrest so her body could focus solely on the work of growing those babies. Jacob enters into covenant with God and states that he will do the work of being in relationship. Patience is an active acceptance while working for life-affirming change. Their time has become our time as individuals and as Church to enter into the labor pains of God doing something new as we face the discomfort of the pandemics of Covid and racism. It's our time to imagine what our lives and our Church could be. Now, just as the wheat and darnel grow together in Mystery; it's unclear which is the wheat until fully formed. But how do we know which is the wheat and which is the weed?

It would be oh, so easy to label individuals and communities as "weeds" or "wheat." It would be easy to say Jacob is the wheat while Esau is the weed. We must vehemently resist this temptation.

One of my favorite movies is *The Breakfast Club*. You may be familiar with this John Hughes film from the 1980s. It's about a group of teenagers that have Saturday detention, and each is known by a label; the jock, the princess, the weirdo, the criminal, the geek. Through the course of the day, they face these imposed identities, allow themselves to be vulnerable, and start to build relationship. They become friends. Each one takes a hard look at themselves, confront each other, validate each other, and see each other below and beyond the labels the school culture has

imposed. It's a messy, hard, day for them and they are between shores on this Saturday of detention. The last lines of the movie are a letter to the principal:

Dear Mr. Vernon,

We accept the fact that we had to sacrifice a whole Saturday in detention for whatever it was we did wrong. But we think you're crazy to make us write an essay telling you who we think we are. You see us as you want to see us - in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions. But what we found out is that each one of us is a brain...and an athlete...and a basket case...a princess...and a criminal...Does that answer your question?

Sincerely yours, the Breakfast Club.

So, we avoid the binary of labeling each other weeds and wheat by diving deep into ourselves with God's help, because we are in relationship with God. We do this individually and collectively as Church. We shine a light to see where there are poisonous weeds and where there is wheat. We groan with the labor pains that as we invite and allow God to cultivate our wheat-like habits that are the fruits of the Spirit while neutralizing and alchemizing our more poisonous tendencies when we neglect to love God and neighbor with our whole hearts. This takes patience, discomfort, and relationship with God and with each other while we are between shores. Creation is waiting for us, and this is what salvation looks like here on Earth; our gift of finest wheat is to love God and each other because we truly are saved together or not at all.

I know we've prayed it once already, but please pray Psalm 139: 22, 23 with me. It's in your service leaflet or the BCP on page 795.

“Search me out, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts. Look well whether there be any wickedness in me and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

-Amen