

Proper 11, July 23, 2017
Fr Joshua D Nelson
Romans 8:26-39 + Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The last few months my life has been a series of tackling a situation and getting organized. First, was the task of packing my life up in Sewanee, a matter of careful separation. You see, at Sewanee I had a roommate, Ashton. After living together for three years our belongings had become all mixed up and become one. On occasion, one would ask the other for use of something, but most of the time it was as if we were complete co-owners. When the time came to begin packing, my inner teacher and experience as a camp counselor took over. I developed a system to separate our things, keep them separated, and know where everything was.

I developed *The Big Book of Moving: Joshua's transition from Sewanee to Elkhart* (full title). It was a large three ring binder, bright pink, so as not to lose it. I created a spreadsheet of every room in my new apartment and assigned a color to each room. As I packed I marked each box with the appropriate color sticker and listed the content into the corresponding column. This was going to make moving *so much easier*. When the day came to move, I had a few classmates over to load everything into the truck. What I failed to do was explain my system to them. The issue before us was loading the truck. In our eagerness to fix the issue as quickly as possible I let them loose. After we closed the truck door and I said goodbye to my friends, my Father asked me where my Big Book of Moving was In that moment I realized our mistake. By sending everyone forth to fix the issue as quickly as possible and load the truck in record time, someone had packed my Big Book of Moving. I was going to have to wait to find it somewhere mid-UNpacking in Elkhart. I should have been more patient. Subsequently, a few items got lost along the way. What I did learn from that though was where to place my focus.

This last Friday, Cynthia and I met to clean and organize both the Parish Office, and the Sacristy. At first glance, this was an enormous undertaking. One not fully completed, but whose little steps are well under way. It could have been very easy to just give up. To look at everything, ignore any patterns we may see, and decide it was a failed project. OR, we could narrow our focus, bit by bit, shelf by shelf, and develop a plan for each step of the way. Keeping calm in the situation. Not getting distracted or overtaken by the weeds.

As has been the case for the last few weeks, Jesus, through Matthew, is taking us all over the farm. How appropriate that the liturgical color of this time is GREEN. Three weeks ago we gave over control to God, took on his yoke, and learned to plough good, straight, furrows for planting. Last week, we planted the seeds, again giving up control and trusting God to what was to become of that seed. Today we learn about the waiting, looking toward the harvest, and again trusting the master farmer.

Today, I want us to begin by imagining ourselves as the wheat; planted in the ground, dying away, and growing to new life. In the fields of today's parable there are some weeds growing up, in the midst of all the good wheat. They have been planted by an enemy in hopes of destruction. There is an interesting thing about this particular type of weed. The greek word for this weed is *zizania*. It is a weed, which when young, is almost indistinguishable from wheat. As it grows and becomes its own, the root systems of the two plants become intertwined. The hope of the enemy is that the Farmer will attempt to remove the weeds, tearing out the good wheat as well in an attempt to keep it

pure, subsequently destroying the entire crop. The farmhands are eager, ready to get rid of the weeds, willing to do damage, not realizing the necessity of a mature plant.

Now a question, what are the weeds in our lives? What things have we spent so much time with that they become difficult for us to even distinguish as sin. It may be big or it may be small. It may be growing up right alongside us.

According to the catechism, *Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation* (BCP 848). Through giving to sin, instead of giving over to God, we purposefully or inadvertently attempt to separate ourselves from God. When we get lost in the weeds; when we allow ourselves to be overcome with the evil we experience in this world; when we turn to despair or force our attention to the immensity of the situation, rather than focusing on God (a recurring theme in the stories of our faith), we find ourselves not able to see the good, to see the light, to see the Master Farmer's plan for the harvest. We find ourselves feeling distant from God, from each other, and from all of creation.

Hear the Good News. Listen to the Gospel. God loves you. God knows the plan for the harvest, and has the patience to see it out. This fact is driven home by the Apostle Paul in the reading we heard today from his Letter to the Roman's. God knows what is best for us. God knows our needs. God knows our thoughts, our joys, our anguish, and our sorrows. He knows them so well, that the Spirit of God is able to express what we cannot. As Paul writes, *"the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him."*

This is not to say that the weeds won't exist. This is not to say that we will never sin again. This is not to say that we will not experience pain and suffering and be witness to evil. But in the end . . . IN THE END IS OUR HOPE. . . the harvest will be made and the righteous will find rest. Even though on this plain we may feel distant, or lost in the weeds we are assured of God's presence, even if it be hard to see or feel. Paul concludes, *"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

So what do we do with this? We must cling to the hope. A practice that may be difficult, but necessary. We must have patience, and trust in the abiding presence and the never failing love of God. We must trust in the plan of the Master Farmer. We must share in community. Just as the wind blows through the wheat and the stalks sway together, so too does the Spirit of God move among us, blowing us in different ways, but proving that we are all in this together. We must follow the example of Jesus and look to nature. God will speak to us and teach us lesson by using all of creation. We need not be so anxious when we begin to feel lost in the weeds. In those moments, we narrow our focus, trusting God in the little steps. Go on growing, God will still take care of the harvest.

I'd like to close with a prayer that I have been using some after communion. It is from Frederick Buechner's book *Telling Secrets*.

"Go where your best prayers take you. Unclench the fists of your spirit and take it easy. Breathe deep of the glad air and live one day at a time. Know that you are precious. Know that you can trust God. "

AMEN