

16th Sunday OT, A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What feeds and sustains your life today? What relationships, values, and beliefs nourish your life? Who are the people that enrich and enliven your life? What are you needing and asking for when you pray that God will give you your daily bread?

In whatever ways you might have answered those questions you have described the wheat in the garden of your soul. And wherever there is a garden you will also find weeds. We don't plant them, and we don't want them, but as today's parable says somehow they always manage to show up. Weeds happen. And that's true whether it is the garden in your backyard or the garden of your life.

The wheat and weeds of our lives grow side by side. Their roots can intertwine. And sometimes what looks like wheat is false wheat, a weed. It means that every gardener of life must be discerning about what she or he is growing, what needs to be tended to, and what needs to be uprooted.

Anything that is not wheat is probably a weed. Weeds are the things that try to take over the field of our life, disfigure the beauty of our garden, and choke out the wheat that feeds, sustains, and nourishes our souls.

I used to think that if you did the right thing, worked hard, had good intentions, and said your prayers – if you sowed good seed – you wouldn't have to deal with the weeds. That's not, however, what happens in today's

parable or life. It seems like I spend more and more time dealing with the weeds in my life. Maybe you do too. So, let's talk about some weeds.

Have you ever claimed a particular value or belief and then done or said the very things that undermine or contradict that value or belief? There's a weed in your field. Paul was talking about it when he said, **"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."**

Do you ever feel like you are not enough? Are you always trying to prove yourself, to be liked and approved of? I wonder what weed is choking your "enoughness," your value, your self-worth.

Have you ever quietly or even not so quietly celebrated someone else's failure? Have you ever felt better about yourself because someone else was struggling? Have you ever been unable or unwilling to celebrate another's joy or success? Are you envious of another? I suspect there is a weed that needs pulling.

Are you holding grudges or resentments? Are you always on the defensive? Do you replay old arguments in your head in such a way that you are the winner? Is it hard to listen to and hear another? If so, weeds are growing.

Are you withholding forgiveness from another? Are you refusing to ask another for forgiveness? Are there amends to be made that you keep putting off? What weeds need to be uprooted so you can reconcile with another and yourself?

If your reading of scripture is narrow and exclusive rather than large and inclusive, if the gospel is good news only for certain ones and not everyone, if the bread of life is stale and day old, then weeds are taking over and need to be pulled.

Is your world divided into right and wrong, good, and bad? Do you find yourself drawing lines in the sand, needing to be right or have the final word? Weeds are growing there.

Do you live as if someone must lose for you to win? Does someone else need to be wrong so you can be right? Is your life based on comparison to and competition with others? Are you keeping the score of your life or another's life? That is a weedy way to live.

Do you find yourself making judgments about others and the weeds in their garden? Do you talk about them instead of talking with them? How many of your conversations are based on gossip or criticism? Why can we clearly see the single weed in our neighbor's garden but not the entire patch in our own?

Do you see the weeds of racism, discrimination, and oppression in America today? Do you see the economic weeds by which the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer? Are you watering those weeds or are you pulling them up?

Are you living less than who you are or want to be? Have you sometimes been afraid to say or do what you knew was the right thing to

say or do? In what ways has fear possessed and paralyzed you? Fear is a deeply rooted weed in most of our gardens.

Do you feel trapped by your past, overwhelmed by guilt, defined by shame? What are you addicted to? What idols control your life? Those are weeds taking over your life.

We pledge ourselves to be **“one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”** But the weeds of division, mistrust, and self-interest are choking the life out of that pledge.

What controls your life today? What keeps you from living the life you want and from being your most authentic self? What is stealing your life? What weeds are disfiguring the beauty of your garden?

That is a lot of weeds. And the list could go on and on.

Do you know how I know about those weeds, and why I can identify them? Those are the weeds I battle. They are the weeds growing in the fields of my life. They are what choke my soul and why I cannot breathe. They disfigure the beauty of my garden. Some of those weeds I have pulled. Some still need to be pulled. Some keep coming back. And some I continue to ignore or even water.

Maybe you know those weeds too. Maybe some of them are growing in your life today. Maybe there are others. What weeds are growing next to your wheat?

Weeding the garden of our life is not about what is wrong, defective, or unacceptable in our life. It is about making room for more life,

discovering the wheat that has always been there, reclaiming the beauty that has been covered over, and trusting the good seed that was planted in the beginning. Weeding takes away to reveal what is already there. Weeding the garden of our life returns our focus to the wheat.

Every time we pull a weed, we also reap a harvest. Every pulled weed is a recognition and an affirmation of life and life abundant, for yourself or another. And every day is harvest day. And every day there are weeds to be pulled. That means we must always pay attention to what is growing in our garden.

I have told you about some of the weeds I deal with in my garden. What about you? Are you willing, right now, before you leave here today, to name just one weed that's got to go?

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Take a look at your garden today. What do you see? What is one weed that you can start on today? Name out loud. Now put your hands around it and pull. Keep pulling. Harder. Don't let go. Roots and all, it is got to go. **Amen.**