

Sermon

Let Both of them Grow

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Last week, the lectionary text was about Jacob extracting the birthright from his brother for a pot of stew. This week, Jacob's dreamscape leads him into a liminal encounter with the God of his ancestors, who introduces himself (sic) as such, in other words, the God of Abraham and Isaac. Many of us are familiar with this text – maybe some of you grew up singing Jacob's Ladder songs -but do you understand what this dream is and just what the use of a "ladder" represents?

I've had reason to see ladders in significant use recently both in my home through a renovation project and here in the church through our renovation. Ladders, as someone who works in a Trauma Center and has seen the results of serious falls, are a blessing and a curse. Falling off a ladder is a very scary thing to do and injuries can be severe. Yet a ladder is a great tool to reach things we otherwise could not. As someone who lives in a house with most people at 5'3" or less, ladders and step stools can be found all over our home. Jacob's ladder is one that too serves an important purpose of reaching something that otherwise was unreachable.

This dream for Jacob completely transformed and changed the course of his life. It changed his life for one very important reason – God had

always intended this covenant, first with Abraham, then with Isaac and now this generation, with Jacob...but through this dream, **Jacob** becomes aware of it. For me, most of my dreams are all over the place...I rarely remember them in totality, sometimes I remember parts or pieces, but every once in a while, I have a dream or a persistent thought, and that eventually becomes clear and I understand it to be from God. What God has done in this story with Jacob is to remind us very distinctly that while God may be something we cannot see or touch, as in a physical being, God is never far from us and is continually trying to reach to us.

I think we frequently look at ladders as a way to get up to something but in this case, the ladder is needed for God to reach down to us. The ladder is used to show us just how close God always is and trying to reach us to give us strength, love, encouragement, and guidance. These moments often redirect us to something new, something different. God is constantly disrupting things, pushing, pulling, pressing.

Our New Testament scripture once again focuses on agriculture, but this week perhaps we can all relate to how challenging it is to keep those weeds that infiltrate our garden beds, at bay. To me, sometimes it seems that overnight they seem to triple in size and volume! I am not an educated gardener, but I do try to at least keep up the few beds I have and when I go to weed, sometimes I'm not entirely sure which are weeds and which are actual healthy plants. I'm always afraid I will pull a plant instead

of a weed. My sister who does have some knowledge told me, if it pulls out fairly easily and doesn't have a solid root, it's likely a weed. So I've always used that as a reference point.

I'm always amazed how long the healthy plants seem to be able to coexist with the weeds and sometimes the weeds are kind of pretty and have colorful blooms or flowers and I don't want to pull them. And as quickly as I pull them, new ones return nearly as soon as I do. To have a successful garden, you have to weed constantly to keep up with it.

In our scripture, the story of which will succeed in this garden bed leaves us on the edge of our seat. We wonder, will the good crop survive or will the weeds choke it out? Like my garden, the weeds, we are told, resemble the good wheat thus posing a dilemma for those who work the land. Once it is established that the presence of these weeds is the result of a deliberate, hostile act, shouldn't the weeds be swiftly removed? But not this time...the field owner counsels the field workers to wait...he instructs, let the wheat and the weeds grow together. There is time enough. At harvest time, the weeds will be pulled and burned...providing a source of fuel.

This paints a picture we can all see and relate to...good and bad, constructive and destructive are inextricably bound together. But let's be honest, as we read this scripture did you think ...(in quotes), "they" are the weeds, or "it" is the weeds – defining something within our lives or within

our world as the *bad*...and “we” are the good? I mean, in life, sometimes it’s hard to truly determine the good and the bad and when it’s time to harvest/burn?

What’s interesting is some things we consider “good” flowers are technically weeds. You see them growing beautifully in a field on the side of the road – pretty yellow blooms, purple flowers, white clusters. At what point do we, you and I, decide that that’s a weed and needs to be removed? What if I see the beauty within it? And in the Spring, all our lawns are covered in beautiful yellow flowers – dandelions. Some can’t wait to mow them away but I love to look at the green and yellow together as Spring begins. And some weeds are medicinal, many are food for humans and animals. I know bunnies love to eat all the clover on my lawn – I see them all day every day and so do my dogs, but that’s another sermon entirely....

Our families, our friendships, our relationships and our churches and our own minds are all filled with good and bad – they coexist within us and throughout our lives. For me, I too often look within myself and only see the weeds – I note all the things that I think need to be changed within me and within my life and I fail to notice that it’s God who decides what needs to be transformed or changed. Sometimes the things I’ve seen as a weakness is truly a strength and becomes something within me that I needed.

Jacob's ladder is always available to us to reach to God and for God to reach down from heaven to us. If there is something within you that you struggle with or you wish were different, it may be time to prune or like the gardener, it may be time to wait and watch...but either way, the harvest time and bounty is up to God. In the meantime, there may be someone looking upon you, and like those pretty yellow flowers, sees what you think is bad as something beautiful. Watch...wait...harvest....and, then, only then – prune.

Amen