

Reflections on Earth Day  
Preacher: Rev. Karen E. Gale  
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12:26

Wheat and Weeds Together  
Matthew 13:24-30

When we think about Jesus, maybe we picture him speaking or preaching. Maybe we visualize him healing or the Last Supper or talking to fisherman.

What we often don't think about is that Jesus was immersed in an agricultural world. Everyone except the very wealthy was. People farmed to sell things but most people farmed just to eat. Land and land management was important. The seasons and cycles of crops and harvest were essential.

Weeds were something everyone worried about. Because a weed wasn't just a nuisance. A weed was a matter of eating or being hungry.

Today's parable talks about a field planted with good seed and then sabotaged with weed seeds. "Oh no," cry the servants. "What are we going to do? Shall we pull out the weeds now while they are small?" Every good gardener would say yes, don't let the weeds get ahead of you. Let's get the weeds while it is easier.

But the master says, "no. Let them grow together and then at the end we will separate them into wheat and weeds." But why wait, they ask? "You might damage the wheat otherwise," says the master. And so they wait.

This seems alien to us. Wait and let the weeds grow? What? But the master was wise. I want you to look at the pictures on the front of your bulletin. They are quite similar. One is wheat. The other is the weed Jesus was talking about in his story often called a tare, or darnel. They look the same when they sprout. The same when they grow. The same until they produce seeds. And then the wheat heads bend toward the ground while the darnel heads stand up straight. You see you don't know for sure what is wheat and what is weed until the end. So it is easy to make a mistake and damage the crop. (The wheat is on the left by the way...)

An equivalent in this day and age might be our decision to just go buy "Round Up ready" wheat seed and plant away knowing that we can then come in and dump some herbicide on the field and the weeds will die. So much easier. But what do we damage in the process?

Or it might be easier if we leave the planting of wheat to the huge agribusiness corporations that plant giant swaths of GMO crops across many of our midwestern states. They might be amber waves of grain. But when the waves are an ocean of monocrop, plant life, insect life including pollinating bees, and animal life that needs diverse habitats, all die out from that area creating almost a desert in an illusion of abundance.

It would be easier if....

I think this might be our greatest environmental sin. It's easier.

It's easier to carry home my groceries in disposable plastic bags. I don't have to remember the reusables.

It's easier to use paper cups for coffee hour rather than run the dishwasher

It's easier for me to drive over the speed limit when I come to work even though it burns more gas and does not respect my fellow drivers.

It's easier to do what we've always done--gas burning cars, coal fired plants, inefficient electrical grids, than to change our power generation structure.  
It's easier...

But easier is not better. Easier is just easier. And most of what Jesus talked about and asks us to do as faithful people is not what is easier.

Over the past couple years I have noticed more and more signs going up in restaurants that tell me how many calories each item has. And armed with that information, I have found my choices have changed. I think twice and can make better choices for myself and my overall health.

I wonder what that would be like with other things. If every time I went to unlock my car I saw a sign that said how much pollution I was causing for each mile I drove, and how many minutes someone had to stand on an oil rig or use dangerous drilling equipment, and how many inches of Alaskan permafrost was melting as a result of my drive. And how many Aleut children would be impacted when they could not reach a doctor because the permafrost was too weak and melted... Suddenly I want to be wiser about my driving choices.

Or buying a new shirt on sale for \$5. The tag doesn't share about the bleaching water dumped into a Bangladeshi river, the lax emissions controls, or the dump it will end up in once I throw it out in a year or two. Sobering. It's not such an easy choice anymore.

But it is so easy to buy it. It only costs \$5. No. Correction, it only costs ME \$5.

If we don't bear the cost ourselves, we can kid ourselves that the cost doesn't exist. This is why the servants say let's pull the weeds now. It was not their field, not their crop. It didn't matter to them if some plants were lost. But it mattered to the master, the owner, the one who paid the cost.

A faith life is about choosing what is right, what is just, and sometimes what is inconvenient, unpopular or hard. We are to make choices based on what is good for all, not just for us, mindful of the cost to all, not just to us.

But in our choosing we find that environmental mindfulness brings us closer to the earth we live on, the people we are connected to even thousands of miles away through our global economy, and the difference we can make one choice at a time when we pay attention to the costs.

And there is some good news:

Did you know running the dishwasher is most likely better for the earth and more water efficient than hand washing? Hooray for that.

And using too many cleaning products is bad for the earth and your own physical self. So we can have dirtier houses. That's good, I'm finally in vogue.

And microwaving is more efficient than using the range. You see. I told my family leftovers were saving the environment!

Here at Pilgrim as a church we can make wider impact decisions too.

Today each of us is invited to fill out a card to be sent to our Senators about staying in the Paris Climate Agreement, a petition sponsored by Interfaith Power and Light and voted for by Council. Caring for the environment is not a political issue, despite how it is portrayed. It is a justice issue. It is a health issue. It is an issue of caring for the least of these as the most vulnerable are the ones most affected by changing climate.

And we are invited to make an impact more locally as you heard Pilgrim folks can garden alongside other faith community members to tend a local piece of earth, to share our labor in the work of creating fresh food for hungry folks in Lexington. To share our stories of why we believe we are called to be stewards of the earth. To remind ourselves, especially those of us who work at desks, with computers, from our cars, to remind ourselves of the earth from which we come and to which we will return. The base upon which all else stands. The ground of our being.

I challenge you to hard choices envisioning those cost signs in all that you do. Whether it is the choice of whether or not to buy the packaging nightmare Lunchables that you kid begs for or to think seriously about putting solar panels on your roof, or to convince your company or university to be serious about handling its electronic waste. Hard choices that look at the whole cost, not your individual cost. Remember, faithful living can be pricey.

I leave you with a classic Jewish folktale: There are two people fighting over a piece of land. Each claimed ownership, and each bolstered the claim with apparent proof. After arguing for a long time, they agreed to resolve their conflict by putting the case before a rabbi. The rabbi sat as an arbitrator and listened carefully, but despite years of legal training the rabbi could not reach a decision. Both parties seemed to be right.

Finally the rabbi said, "Since I cannot decide to whom this land belongs, let's ask the land." The rabbi put an ear to the ground, and after a moment stood up. "My friends, the land said it belongs to neither of you – but that you belong to it." Amen.