

The other day, I found myself wandering around my yard, pulling weeds. Sometimes I do it without even thinking. I spot one between the flowers, and before I know it, I've already plucked it out. I bet many of you do the same.

It seems like we humans are natural weed-pullers. We don't like disorder or things growing where we didn't put them. We want everything to look just right.

But in today's parable, Jesus, of course, isn't really talking about our gardens. He's talking about God's field.

In God's field, everyone in today's Gospel wants to pull the weeds—except for God.

The servants see the weeds and ask, "Do you want us to go and gather them?"

The landowner simply says, "No."

It's not that the weeds don't matter. Anyone who's cared for a garden or a field knows they do. Weeds take up space where good things could grow. They use up nutrients that young plants need. And sometimes, they just don't belong.

Right?

So yeah, to the servants who are focused on sorting them out, the wheat matters more than the weeds.

But the "landowner" is focused on *growing*.

Makes me wonder if Jesus isn't holding up a mirror to us, as he often does. Because we all know human beings can become compulsive weed-pullers in more places than the garden.

We're quick to decide what kind of person someone is. We hear a story or a rumor and pass it on. We notice an accent, a tattoo, or someone's skin color. Maybe it's a hat, a headline, or the way someone talks or moves. Often, before we even know their name, we've already decided who they are.

We all do it.

The world is always asking us to decide who belongs. Who's one of us? Who isn't?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Russian novelist and dissident who survived years in Soviet prison camps, once wrote, *"The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart."*

That's exactly what Jesus refuses to let us forget...The temptation is always to imagine that evil is "out there," in *"those people"*.

Jesus reminds us that each of us stands in need of God's mercy, and every one of us stands in need of God's grace. He does it in the same way Solzhenitsyn critiques *everyone*. No one gets to place themselves on the "good" side of the line every time.

And the reality is, we often can't tell the difference between wheat and weeds ourselves.

And, so the Gospel keeps asking us a different question:

That person you are labeling in your head...that person who is being othered...can you recognize that it is Christ standing right there in front of you?

One of the challenges and disciplines of the Christian life is resisting the temptation to make anyone smaller than they really are. Because every person we meet is always more than the labels we've consciously or unconsciously given them.

They are someone God loves.

Jesus' listeners would have known that the weed he describes looked almost exactly like wheat while it was growing. Their roots became intertwined. Pull too soon, and you risk destroying the wheat along with the weeds.

The servants are certain they know what they're looking at.

The landowner knows they don't. So, he says, *"Wait. Leave the judging to me. The work I give you is different. Your work is not sorting. Your work is growing."*

And that brings us to this morning.

Today, we gather around the waters of baptism. We gather with a child whose whole life stretches out before them and with an adult who has traveled a few more years to arrive at this font.

Both are at the beginning of a new season of growth. They have different stories, have traveled different journeys. Yet, both receive exactly the same grace.

God takes an ordinary human life and plants it more deeply into the life of Christ. And this is for all of us, too.

In just a few moments, we'll renew our Baptismal Covenant. Together, we'll make the vows that bind us as the Body of Christ... vows that shape us and teach us how to live as followers of Jesus in the world.

Some of those promises root us in God—learning the faith, gathering around the table, praying together.

Some remind us that growth always includes repentance and a new beginning.

They aren't random promises. They are how God grows us.

And then come those final promises. The ones that seem to stay with us long after the service has ended.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

I wonder why those are the vows we so often remember?

Perhaps it's because that's where faith is tested. Not only in what we believe. But in how we see another human being. Perhaps those are the promises that stay with us because they're the hardest to keep.

Respecting the dignity of every human being isn't simply about being polite and nice Christian people.

It's a way of seeing. It's looking at another person and remembering that before they are anything else, before any label we might give them, they are someone, just like us, for whom Christ lived, died, and rose again.

That's what baptism teaches us.

It teaches us to see the world through the eyes of Christ.

Barbara Brown Taylor once wrote that *"God is more interested in growth than perfection."* I think that's exactly what Jesus is saying here. God is more interested in growing saints than producing perfect people.

Today, we'll promise to support these newly baptized in their life in Christ. In other words, we'll promise to help them grow. That's what the Church does. We pray for one another. We worship together. We forgive one another. And we support each other in the often-challenging work of the Gospel lived out in our lives.

And we grow together, wheat and weeds alike, because we are both. And because none of us grows alone.

So perhaps this Gospel isn't asking us to become better at identifying weeds. Perhaps it's asking us to trust the One who owns the field.

To keep growing. To help one another grow. To see Christ in the people growing beside us. And to stand by them, no matter the cost, in his name.

Because baptism is not the day God declares that we have finally become wheat. It is the day God plants us more deeply into the life of Christ and says,

"The field is mine... You don't have to manage it. You don't have to decide who belongs. You don't have to carry that burden."

"You all belong here. Love who is planted there with you."

Amen.