

“No Shortcuts”

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Gen. 29:15-28

Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

[The farmer in Jesus' parable said,]

'...in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

Let both of them grow together until the harvest...' Matt. 13:29b-30a

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to be patient with one another and not be so focused on

the weeds of life at the cost of neglecting the life-giving wheat. Amen

Yesterday morning – around 7:00 am while it was still cool-er,  
the first Late Spring/Early Mid-Summer Groundskeeping  
Spruce-Up Day took place

to weed & trim, spread fertilizer & carry off debris for compost.

Maybe next year we could have a contest for who finds the most exotic  
wildflower, weed, or bug – after all, this is Florida which is filled

with wild, random, and extravagant examples of God's creation.

There was one weed that looked like water cress –  
something you might put on your salad,  
except that it was long and stringy and  
growing up inside a small-leafed shrub.

If it had stronger roots, it would have been very difficult to pull out  
such a weed because it was entangled in the shrub's roots

and the other plant would have been uprooted along with it.

Now wouldn't we all like our gardens to be perfect – with no weeds at all?

And wouldn't we like our lives to be the same way?

Unfortunately, our lives can really get complex,

interwoven with circumstances of limited resources,

narrow windows of opportunity, and

people who look, act, and even think differently than us.

Problems arise when those who think they know better

take matters into their own hands without considering

others' point of view and so, they try to pull out the 'weeds'.

We see it in acts of violence that are sometimes dramatic,

filling up the headlines, and sometimes subtle behind closed doors.

We see it in the hardening of hearts that would prefer system failure

rather than compromise.

Willard, p.2

Ego gets us into more trouble than probably any of us want to admit;  
And all the great spiritual traditions agree that we should “die to self” –  
but that ‘self’ is the selfish part of us called the ‘ego’  
and that’s not the same as our identity as persons  
deserving dignity & equal opportunity.

Fortunately, Jacob knew the difference  
in his dealings with his Uncle Laban.

Jacob had a right to be upset –  
Imagine his dismay to find out after seven years that –  
when he woke up in the morning after the wedding,  
it was not Rachel with whom he thought he was betrothed,  
but Leah with whom he had consummated the marriage!  
And as an explanation, his Uncle Laban tells him,  
“Oh, in this country, we don’t marry off our younger daughters  
before the eldest is hitched!  
Too bad you’re not acquainted with our ways.  
Too bad you didn’t read the fine print.”

What Jacob does, though, is to set his ego aside, despite his disappointment.  
And he plays along with the hand he has been dealt –  
so, he works for his uncle another seven years  
to win the hand of his true love, Rachel.  
There was no shortcut to what Jacob really wanted in life  
and that’s true for any of us.

Is there some regret you have in life such that –  
if you had had the chance, you would have chosen differently?  
Perhaps this choice was the lesser of two evils,  
or it could even have been about picking between two goods.  
However, as you consider this, also think about what would have been lost  
if things went the way you wanted?  
What would have been the cost to who you have become?  
For who you are now is the result of what you went through before –  
and hopefully, you have learned from your regrets.

As we might ask, “Where was God in this story about Jacob?”  
we could ask the same question about our own lives.  
Wouldn’t the answer be in how well we were able to learn from  
what our mistakes had to teach us and how our failures strengthened us  
and that opportunities were still provided for us  
to do better the next time?

Willard, p.3

Jacob is not a model citizen – he is more like the ‘trickster’ character Coyote in Native American folktales, who is not to be trusted. But in this case, the trickster is tricked by someone who is trickier and so, he takes his lumps – but it will lead to growth.

Under Jacob’s care, Laban’s flocks have increased and made his uncle very prosperous.

In return, Jacob asks only to be given any of the lambs that had an unusual color or configuration.

He had been given an insight about the genetic heredity of sheep and goats though under the false impression that if a pregnant ewe or she-goat just looked on striped sticks set up by their watering place that their lambs would be striped, spotted, speckled, or black.

Oh, and Jacob moves his camp three days journey away so that Laban can’t see what he’s up to.

It so happens that most of the lambs and baby goats from then on are striped, spotted, speckled, or black –  
so Jacob himself becomes very prosperous.

His uncle discovers this as Jacob has packed up and fled with his two wives, servants, eleven sons, and his striped, spotted, speckled, and black flocks of animals.

Laban is furious, but God has warned him not to interfere – and Laban himself demonstrates some improved character as he graciously blesses them all to go on their way.

And that path will lead Jacob back to his homeland to face his brother Esau, whom he had cheated out of his inheritance many years before.

And so this story is to be continued –

a story of clever turns with God as the ultimate trickster who accomplished not only peace and prosperity for Jacob, but also helped him find a patient faith in the midst of life’s struggles.

If Jacob had only taken Rachel as his wife – as he had hoped in the first place, what would have happened?

Would he have been as prosperous? Would he have been satisfied too early? Would he have grown as a person in the ways that he did?

There’s no way of knowing what that would mean for him or for any of us, except to look at who we have become so far.

Amen

*Our Jewish Scripture lesson today is from Genesis 29:15-28  
and continues with the story of Jacob  
who tricked his older brother Esau out of his birthright.  
But Jacob is going to meet up with someone just as tricky...*

Gen. 29:15-28

15 Then Laban said to Jacob,

‘Because you are my kinsman,  
should you therefore serve me for nothing?  
Tell me, what shall your wages be?’

16 Now Laban had two daughters;

the name of the elder was Leah,  
and the name of the younger was Rachel.

17 Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful.

18 Jacob loved Rachel; so he said,

‘I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.’

19 Laban said,

‘It is better that I give her to you than  
that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.’

20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel,

and they seemed to him but a few days  
because of the love he had for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban,

‘Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.’

22 So Laban gathered together all the people of the place,  
and made a feast.

23 But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob;  
and he went in to her.

24 (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.)

25 When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban,

‘What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel?  
Why then have you deceived me?’

26 Laban said,

‘This is not done in our country—  
giving the younger before the firstborn.

27 Complete the week of this one,

and we will give you the other also  
in return for serving me for another seven years.’

28 Jacob did so, and completed her week;

then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

24 [Jesus] put before them another parable:

‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone  
who sowed good seed in his field;

25but while everybody was asleep,  
an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat,  
and then went away.

26So when the plants came up and bore grain,  
then the weeds appeared as well.

27And the slaves of the householder came and said to him,  
“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

Where, then, did these weeds come from?”

28He answered,

“An enemy has done this.”

The slaves said to him,

“Then do you want us to go and gather them?”

29But he replied,

“No; for in gathering the weeds  
you would uproot the wheat along with them.

30Let both of them grow together until the harvest;  
and at harvest time I will tell the reapers,

Collect the weeds first and bind them

in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house.

And his disciples approached him, saying,

‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’

37He answered,

‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;

38the field is the world,

and the good seed are the children of the kingdom;

the weeds are the children of the evil one,

39and the enemy who sowed them is the devil;

the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

40Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire,  
so will it be at the end of the age.

41The Son of Man will send his angels,

and they will collect out of his kingdom

all causes of sin and all evildoers,

42and they will throw them into the furnace of fire,

where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

43Then the righteous will shine like the sun

in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!’