

Reflection – Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

There was an exercise we used to do with the children in faith formation years ago. The topic of the lesson this particular week was discerning the voice of God in our lives. What we did was put a plastic tarp on the floor. We would then pair up two of the students and put a blindfold on one of them. Once the blindfold was on, we would crack eggs on the tarp at various places. The blindfolded person would stand on one side of the tarp and their partner on the other side. The partner's job was to yell instructions to the blindfolded person to come to them across the tarp while directing them not to step on any of the broken eggs. Then we would have other children yelling different directions at the blindfolded person. Their job was to be able to discern their partner's voice out of all the voices and follow it. It didn't always go well.

That is our mission in life, isn't it? To pick out God's voice from all the voices that are coming at us every day. As with the children, it doesn't always go well. We are told in today's gospel of a landowner who sowed good seed in his field, but while all were asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. I think that good seed that Jesus is referring to is us. I think we are all put here with a unique set of gifts to be used for the sole purpose of building God's kingdom. We spend a good part of our life trying to discern exactly what those gifts are and then trying to figure out where God is calling us to use them. If we can accomplish those two tasks, then we are going to be truly "good seed" for the world.

But, here is the other side of the equation. What is the bad seed? Is there any such thing? I recently read a commentary on this gospel where the author asked that very question. He used the example of dandelions. Usually referred to as a weed but yet, is the main ingredient in dandelion wine, of which he was a big fan. It shows

that even things we might initially view as bad, can be used for good. I think that is why the owner of the field is hesitant to let his workers go gather those weeds right away. He told them that if they tried to do this too soon, they would uproot the wheat along with the weeds.

This is a wonderful metaphor for the so-called weeds that come our way in our lives. Our first reaction is usually to want to eliminate the perceived problem immediately, without any thought that there may be a lesson for me here. I have found that this is an attitude that is becoming more and more prevalent in our society today and, unfortunately, in our church. We find it increasingly difficult to walk hand-in-hand with people who think differently than us, worship differently than us or maybe even live differently than us. There seems to be a growing movement in our church, and I think it has always been there, but recently, is making a big come back, that feels we, as Roman Catholics, possess the “real truth.” I recently had someone tell me that there was only salvation in our church. To say I disagreed with this thought would be a huge understatement. One reason I say this has always been an under current in our church can be the language we use. Have you ever heard someone use the term, or have you use it yourself, “non-Catholic”? I think we have all said it without a thought of how this creates an “us and them” mentality. After all, have you ever heard of a non-United, or a non-Presbyterian? I haven’t. But this mindset doesn’t just exist in our church. I had a good friend of mine, who grew up in the United church, tell me that when she was a little girl and would walk down the street with her mother, if they passed a Roman Catholic church, they would stop and her mother would point at the church and tell her that God doesn’t live there. I only say this because I think that we churchy people need to be better than that. And I think we can be. We just need to remember that when we say, “us or them”, there is no “them”.

And I believe God calls us to live this out beyond the walls of our various churches. There is great need in our world today, but, especially in our city. Did you know that Moncton has the highest homeless rate per capita in all North America. Let that sink in for a moment. And while there are many people doing great work to try and help these folks, there are just as many people (and I would argue more) who view them as a weed, growing among us” that needs to be eliminated. I recently heard a politician refer to the homeless as an “issue”. They weren’t people, they were an issue.

I think we need to see these people as God’s beloved sons and daughters. Their current life situation was not the plan when they were in elementary school and telling the teacher what they wanted to be when they grew up. I don’t think anyone said they wanted to be living on the street by the time they were 30. Yet, in all of this there are stories of redemption. Of someone being able to turn their life around. And it usually starts with a kind act from a stranger. I would like to share the following story with you:

A woman approached a man slouched on the sidewalk. “Good morning,” she said gently.

The man, clearly homeless, glanced up warily. She was well-dressed, someone who had likely never known hunger. He assumed she was there to mock him. “Leave me alone,” he muttered. But she didn’t leave. Instead, she smiled. “Are you hungry?” He scoffed. “Sarcastic much? I just had breakfast with the president. Now, go away.”

Her smile didn’t falter. Instead, she reached down and took his arm. “What are you doing, lady?” he snapped, jerking away.

A nearby police officer noticed and approached. “Is there a problem, ma’am?”

“No problem,” she replied calmly. “Just helping this gentleman up. Could you assist me?”

The officer hesitated. “That’s old Jack. He’s been here for years. What do you want with him?”

She nodded toward a small diner across the street. “I want to buy him breakfast.”

Jack resisted at first, but with the woman’s firm yet kind persistence—and the officer’s silent support—he reluctantly followed her inside.

The diner manager immediately frowned. “What’s going on, officer? This man causing trouble?”

“No,” the officer said. “This lady is buying him a meal.”

The manager folded his arms. “Not in here. Bad for business.”

Jack chuckled dryly. “Told you, lady. Let me go.”

But the woman didn’t budge. Instead, she turned to the manager.

“Are you familiar with Eddy & Associates, the banking firm down the street?”

The manager’s expression hardened. “Of course. They hold their weekly meetings in my banquet room.”

She extended her hand. “I’m Penelope Eddy, the company’s president.”

The manager blanched. “Oh.”

Her smile remained warm. “Thought that might matter. Now, would you mind bringing us some coffee?”

The officer stifled a laugh. “You sure put him in his place.”

“That wasn’t my intention,” she said softly before turning to Jack.

“Do you remember me?”

Jack squinted, studying her face. “You do look familiar...”

She nodded. “Years ago, I was just like you—no home, no job, no money. I walked into this very diner, and you were the one who fed me. You paid for my meal out of your own pocket when I had nothing.”

Jack’s eyes widened. His voice cracked. “That was you?”

She reached into her purse and handed him a business card. “Go see Mr. Lyons at my company. He’ll set you up with a job. I’ll make sure you get an advance for clothes and a place to stay.”

Jack’s hands trembled as he took the card. “How can I ever thank you?”

Penelope’s eyes softened. “Don’t thank me. Thank God. He led me to you.”

As they stepped outside, the officer shook his head in awe. “I think I just witnessed a miracle.”

Penelope smiled. “Sometimes, kindness comes full circle.”

We don’t help people because we expect to get something in return. We do it because that is who we are as churchy people. I believe God’s voice is constantly trying to remind us of that, if we can just pick that voice out of all the voices that are trying to tell us to get rid of the weeds.

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