

What if we embrace the weeds?

Psalm 139:1-12,23-24; Genesis 28:10-19; Matthew 13:24-30

Just last week, I was talking about immigration and how new Australians perceived this place – how they imagined Australia to be...

And bang! What have we here but the parable of the weeds. Foreigners ARE weeds¹. They are odd creatures from another place who often don't look like the others.

This week the Sydney Morning Herald ran an article about the City of Sydney volunteer ambassadors². They provide information to tourists at Circular Quay. Did you know about 264 cruise ships will dock this year?

Apparently, the most common question is, 'where is the opera house?' which requires a certain level of diplomacy and graciousness in response³. The story highlighted some of the volunteers....for example,

Fatma Ibrahim, a Bankstown childcare worker, volunteers on Fridays. Fatima decided to volunteer after her marriage break down when she realised she was becoming isolated in the burbs.

Rajanikhil Malaramuthan, 26, arrived in Australia a year ago to study international relations at the University of Sydney. A former journalist in southern India, he volunteers on weekends to thank Australia for giving him the opportunity to study here. He said, "I wanted to do something for this country and the city," because he found it so diverse and welcoming. He thought it would be nice for tourists to be able to find someone who spoke their language.

Not all the 125 volunteers are migrants, but it does reinforce what I was saying last week. Sometimes, we need to see ourselves reflected in the eyes of others. How others think we are or should be....Or not. Trust me, this will make sense when we talk about how we decide who is a weed.

One primary school teacher brought two trays of Petunias to class. He established a morning routine where each student, as they came into the room, would speak to one tray of Petunias. They would wish them well. Tell them they hope to grow healthy. Ask them if they have everything they needed. They would tell them how

¹ Or weeds are foreigners

² SMH *Where is the opera house? City volunteers reveal tourists most common questions* by Julie Power, 18 July 2023

³ Especially as they are standing on Circular Quay where the opera house dominates the landscape

lovely they will be when they grow up. They also had to greet the other tray – with insults. No one likes you. You are ugly. You will never grow strong and beautiful. They had to say the same thing to each tray every day and I assume each child picked their own ‘greeting’ to ensure continuity. Well, you don’t have to be a genius to figure out one tray thrived and the other didn’t...and that was just words.

Professor Amy Cuddy followed up with some body research. We all know that our minds can change our bodies – just like the Petunias, she has proved our bodies can change our minds. My Dad was a great exponent of ‘fake it until you make it’. But he didn’t know how that really worked.

Cuddy taught a group of people ‘power poses’.⁴ That’s the physical postures our bodies take up when we feel comfortable and confident. Like when you stretch out with your hands behind your head (a typical male pose). She set up a job interview panel. She got one group to practice a power pose for 2 minutes. Two minutes! And the control group did no such thing. They just waited in the waiting room like we normally do, playing on their phones or whatever. The interview panel knew nothing of this – they just interviewed each candidate as intensely as you would for a real job. Guess which ones they picked?

Cuddy’s theory is that before any stressful situation, you find a stairwell or bathroom and do a 2-minute pose. In fact, she says, if people did that every day, the whole world would treat them differently. They could change their lives.

So what’s all this got to do with weeds? Well, we have to ask, what defines a weed and who decides?

It doesn’t always make sense to keep weeds in the short term. They certainly cost in terms of productivity and yield. However, weeds have so many important roles to play.

Dairy farmers know just the right mix of ‘weeds’ in the grass that give cows a balanced diet and will hay well at the end of the season. Cotton farmers learned that they needed to leave wild refuges not just for the animals but for the weeds. Insects need weeds. Without insects, there’s no birds, without birdswell, you get it.

⁴ Look up body language – there are about 6 different poses and or watch Ted Talk *Your Body Language Make Shape Who You Are*,
[/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are?user_email_address=6f08c735122cf66d8224344bc82aa77f&lctg=62d1b25554733608143034ae](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are?user_email_address=6f08c735122cf66d8224344bc82aa77f&lctg=62d1b25554733608143034ae)

California orchardists buy in bee keepers/suppliers every spring. Intensive farming has eliminated natural habitat that could support local bee colonies. Bees are essential for pollination. So, a new industry has sprung up of mobile bee keepers who charge orchardists a lot of money to leave their hives in the fields. It used to be the other way around!

In the Monaro and Central West, pastoralists have discovered that leaving patches of weed in paddocks brings the water table back closer to the surface and restores natural soaks. Greener pastures, less watering, happy cows.

Almost all the spices we use every day were weeds growing amongst rocky European hillsides.

Our food is developed through breeding and propagation improving on what was once wild food. Corn, rice, bananas, soy were all wild crops that our ancestors gathered. Over years we have improved quality and yield with hybrids but if we lose the wild root crops, we are vulnerable to disaster.⁵

Weeds have been used as medicines – and poisons – for 1000s of years. That's it, for good AND evil.

So what about this parable. The thing I liked about it is the patience and wisdom the farmer shows. Despite the fact, he may think the weeds have been planted by someone evil, he is willing to reduce the yield to watch and discern: is this a good thing or a bad? He knows his land. He is patient to respect the sacred place, God's soil. It is about a sense of place and confidence that God, the ultimate judge, is everywhere, in the soil, in the yield and in him. He would not risk harming the roots of his crop. There will be no collateral damage to the innocents. The farmer is happy to leave the decision to harvest time – when things get sorted.

Perhaps we are too quick to decide who's a weed. The parable reminds us that we are quick to judge and quick to write-off those that are less than we think they should.⁶

This parable has most often been used by church leaders to talk about how we weed out undesirables from our congregations. Premature weeding will damage the crop as

⁵ Many of the hybrids cannot replicate themselves – they may be vulnerable to diseases we haven't even imagined...We need access to their mothers and fathers to strengthen what we have, or to start again. There is a world-wide movement to protect the wild ancestors of our food sources.

⁶ When Jesus was preaching, there were a number of people travelling around the countryside claiming new enlightenment and messianic potential. Many of them claimed to be THE one; THE answer. Were they weeds or were they John the Baptist, preparing the soil? Did they enrich or challenge or were they opportunists?

well. Purifying the church will not sanctify it either. A harmed person, harms the church. Church discipline has its place but it also has to be tempered with a long look, patience and remembering who is the ultimate judge. And while we're judging – we can also turn it on ourselves...

“What if the wheat and the weeds are both part of the field of our hearts?”⁷ We have good and bad within us (Paul harps on about this a lot!)...Maybe some of our lesser traits have a purpose as well. Cynicism can save us from exploitation or being fooled by false idols. Jealousy can compel us to work harder and be better than our lazy selves would have allowed.

“There is compassionate wisdom in cautioning against pulling up the tender roots of wheat in our zeal to get rid of the weeds.”⁸ Many of us are so disheartened by our flaws, like a failed dieter, we want to purge the ugliness from our innards – but where is the love and care for ourselves in that? The farmer is much more trusting in the natural process and is not panicked by the imperfections in his crop. We need to learn to be a master gardener and have confidence in the growth and process.

Ultimately, it comes back to both Jacob and our psalm. This remarkable psalm does not ask for anything. It is not a petition but an offering. Test me, I am true. I am yours. It is a happy song sung by a person confident in their relationship; aware of God's presence in every moment and every place.

While Jacob needed to be reminded of God's presence in this place. He saw this as a gateway rather than a field of dreams. Jacob's story reminds us that God does the work of healing and blessing, inviting and growing, restoring and anointing...⁹ and I would add, where and when the divine chooses. It will be sorted in the winnowing.

In the meantime, we need to tend to our Petunias. We need to treat ourselves with the patience and tenderness needed for everyone's potential to have a chance to grow into something wonderful. And when we are afflicted by weeds, we need to wait and see what is their place and what is their purpose. All will be revealed. All will be well.

⁷ Rev Sue Grace, Companions on the way, 19 July 2023, Companionsontheway.com

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid