

**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 11A**

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

**JULY 23, 2023**

St. David's Episcopal Church

N. Chesterfield, VA

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THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS! IT'S A FAMILIAR PARABLE. SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I'D BEEN STANDING THERE WITH JESUS WHAT WOULD I HAVE THOUGHT. WOULD I HAVE UNDERSTOOD IT? WHAT DID HE MEAN? IS IT ABOUT ME? IS IT ABOUT THE PEOPLE STANDING THERE BESIDE ME?

WHO AM I? . . . AM I A GRAIN OF WHEAT? COULD I BE A WEED? AM I BOTH? DO I PRODUCE WHEAT IN MY LIFE OR DO I GROW WEEDS? DO THE WEEDS IN MY LIFE THAT SPROUT UP IN ME IMPEDE THE GOOD CROP – THE WHEAT? MY GUESS IS WE ALL HAVE AT LEAST A FEW WEEDS IN OUR LIVES!

THEY'RE SPRINKLED AROUND: THINGS THAT DISTRACT, THINGS THAT TAKE US DOWN THE WRONG PATH, OR AFFECT OUR LIFESTYLE. WEEDS KEEP US FROM LIVING THE FULL LIFE GOD HAS CALLED US TO. WEEDS COME IN ALL SORTS OF SHAPES AND SIZES! THEY COME IN UNEXPECTED WAYS – THEY ARISE FROM INSIDE US – A WEED OF YOUR OWN MAKING. THEY COME FROM THE OUTSIDE TOO – FROM ANOTHER PERSON OR SITUATION. FOR EXAMPLE:

AS I WOKE UP SATURDAY MORNING, A THOUGHT SUDDENLY FLASHED THROUGH MY MIND: – “YOU FORGOT TO PUT IN THE WHITES IN HER EYES”. . . . “YOU FORGOT TO PUT THE WHITES OF HER EYES!!!!!!”.

TOF YOU LISTENING THIS SEEMED LIKE A RATHER STRANGE STATEMENT! “YOU FORGOT TO PUT IN THE WHITES IN HER EYES”. BUT, TO ME IT WAS RELEVANT! ALL WEEK, I'VE BEEN PARTICIPATING IN AN ICON WRITING WORKSHOP. WE FINISHED FRIDAY AFTERNOON. SO WHEN THIS THOUGHT CAME TO ME YESTERDAY MORNING, I REALIZED:

“OH MY GOSH! THE ICON I JUST FINISHED HAS A SERIOUS PROBLEM! I FORGOT TO PUT THE WHITES IN HER EYES. SUDDENLY IN THIS NEWLY FINISHED ICON I HAD SPENT THE ENTIRE WEEK WORKING ON – HAD A HUGE UGLY WEED. FOR FIVE DAYS WE ALL WORKED ON THE ICON OF OUR CHOICE. MINE WAS JOAN OF ARC. IT’S AN INTENSE WEEK –FULL DAYS 9-5 WITH A “RACE ON FRIDAY TO THE FINISH LINE”.

I AWOKE THIS SATURDAY MORNING THE THOUGHT, THE MESSAGE WAS ONE OF THOSE HOLY SPIRIT ZINGERS THAT SOMETIMES FLEW INTO MY THOUGHTS: “YOU FORGOT TO PUT A LITTLE DAB OF WHITE PAINT IN THE CORNER OF HER EYES.” I SCURRIED OUT OF MY BED, AND WENT TO THE ICON OF JOAN RESTING ON THE MANTEL IN THE LIVING ROOM. SURE ENOUGH, THERE IT WAS – MY NEWLY FINISHED ICON OF JOAN OF ARC – MISSING THAT LITTLE DAB OF WHITE IN HER EYES THAT GIVES HER LIGHT AND SPARKLE -- LIFE! NO WONDER HER EYES LOOKED SO BLANK! HOW COULD I HAVE MISSED IT?

THERE’S A LITTLE WEED IN MY FINISHED ICON! – IT WOULD HAVE CHANGED IT FOREVER -- DIMINISHED IT. AND, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO DISAPPOINTING AFTER ALL THAT WORK. JOAN OF ARC HAS ALWAYS BEEN A HEROINE TO ME. SINCE SEEING INGRID BERGMAN PORTRAY JOAN IN THE 1948 MOVIE – JOAN OF ARC, JOAN BECAME FOREVER ONE OF THOSE HEROES TO ME – A WOMAN OF GOD, A WOMAN OF STRENGTH, AND A LEADER OF DARING WHO FOLLOWED GOD’S CALL TO THE END – A CALL THAT EVENTUALLY LED TO REJECTION, IMPRISONMENT AND FINALLY DEATH BY BURNING AT THE STAKE. IN SPITE OF HER SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP OF THE FRENCH ARMY AND VICTORY OVER THE ENGLISH, SHE BECAME A PARIAH – A WEED NOT ONLY TO THE ENGLISH, BUT TO THE FRENCH DAUPHIN AND HIS ADVISORS. THEY PLOTTED TO UPROOT AND DESTROY HER.

I WAS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN WHEN I SAW THE MOVIE. ALTHOUGH THIS LITTLE PROTESTANT GIRL DIDN'T COMPREHEND ALL THE FORCES THAT EFECTED JOAN'S LIFE, SHE BECAME ONE OF MY HEROINES. SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN THERE IN THE BACKGROUND – GIVING ME COURAGE TO BE A NAVY WIFE, TO BECOME A PRIEST, TO BE BRAVE IN THE DEATH OF A CHILD AND OTHER LOSSES. MARK TWAIN WROTE A BEAUTIFUL BOOK ON JOAN'S LIFE – IT'S VERY DIFFERENT FROM HIS TOM SAWYER AND HUCKLEBERRY FINN BOOKS. HE CONSIDERED THIS HIS MOST IMPORTANT BOOK.

SO WRITING AN ICON OF JOAN OF ARC WAS A GREAT JOY FOR ME. FRIDAY AFTERNOON, AS WORKSHOP DREW TO A CLOSE, THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS TO ATTEND TO – THE FINAL LITTLE FINISHING TOUCHES. NO MATTER HOW HARD I WORKED ALL WEEK, IT ALWAYS FEELS LIKE IT'S A RACE TO THE FINISH LINE. LINES ARE REDRAWN, AND LIFE GIVING LINES ARE ADDED. THERE ARE SMALL LITTLE TOUCH UPS/REPAIRS, THINGS MISSED – ALL TO BE DONE BEFORE THE MANY PAINT CONTAINERS ARE PUT DISPOSED OF IN THE TRASH. SOMEHOW I MISSED SEEING THIS OMISSION – OF THE WHITE IN JOAN'S EYES!

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THAT FLASH OF HOLY SPIRIT'S INSIGHT AS I AWOKE SATURDAY MORNING! IT CAME OUT OF THE BLUE!!! I HAD NOT DREAMED OF ICONS DURING THE NIGHT OR EVEN THOUGHT OF THEM AS I WENT TO BED. TIRED FROM THE LONG INTENSE WEEK, I FELL ASLEEP QUICKLY. IF I HADN'T HAD THAT EARLY MORNING “AHA” MOMENT, I MIGHT HAVE NOT NOTICED IT AT ALL.

WHAT IF I HADN'T NOTICED? WHAT IF SEVERAL WEEKS LATER WHEN OUR ICONS DRIED SUFFICIENTLY AND I'D PUT THE PROTECTIVE COATS ON IT – FIRST A SHELLAC MIXTURE, FOLLOWED A DAY OR TWO LATER WITH COATS OF VARNISH? THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO GOING BACK, NO POSSIBILITY OF CORRECTION. SO, THIS SATURDAY MORNINGS' INSIGHT WAS A GIFT OF GOD. I'LL BE ABLE TO ADD THE

BIT OF WHITE PAINT BRINGING THE LIGHT AND SPARKLE TO JOAN'S EYES. THE LITTLE LIFE KILLING WEED OF THE MISSING WHITE PAINT WILL BE CORRECTED/ REMOVED.

TO ME THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW WEEDS SNEAK INTO OUR LIVES. MY LIFE HAS WEEDS IN IT AND SO DOES YOURS. SOME ARE SMALL, INSIGNIFICANT. OTHERS ARE BIG AND MAKE A HUGE IMPACT. GENERALLY, WEEDS ARE THOSE THINGS WHICH KEEP US FROM BECOMING THE PERSON GOD IS CALLING US TO BE – WHETHER ITS LITTLE QUIRKS OR HABITS – THINGS WE DO THAT ANNOY OTHERS OR BIGGER THINGS WHERE WE HURT OTHERS.. HONESTLY, I'D NEVER THOUGHT OF A WEED IN RELATIONSHIP TO AN ICON UNTIL SATURDAY!! BUT THE FAILURE, THE MISTATKE TO CORRECT THE EYES WOULD HAVE SO DIMINISHED MY ICON OF JOAN.

WE ARE A MIXTURE OF WHEAT AND WEEDS. THAT'S WHY IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO TAKE TIME AT THE END OF THE DAY – TO REFLECT ON THE DAY, TO PRAY FOR THINGS DONE AND LEFT UNDONE, THINGS SAID THAT MIGHT OF HAVE BEEN HURTFUL OR HARMFUL, THINGS FOR WHICH WE MIGHT APOLOGIZE, OR ASK FORGIVENESS. WE ALL HAVE WEEDS IN OUR LIVES!

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WEEDS IN YOUR LIFE?

HOW DO YOU HANDLE THEM?

WE'RE CALLED TO ALLOW GOD IN CHRIST TO POINT OUT OUR OWN WEEDS, MAY WE EACH HAVE THE COURAGE TO TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TO REMOVE THE WEEDS AND TO ALLOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN CHRIST TO FLOURISH IN US IN THE SAME WAY THAT ADDING THE MISSING WHITE PAINT TO THE ICON OF JOAN OF ARC WILL ALLOW IT TO BE ALL THAT IT WAS INTENDED TO BE.