

Staying Rooted in the Places of Grace

Meta

Date: July 19, 2026

Location: Apostles Anglican Church

Readings

Opening

Summer is reading season, isn't it? While I'm usually drawn to nonfiction reading through the year, there's something about reading fiction in the summer time that fits, especially if you're headed to the beach. Full length novels are great, but I also have to remember some of the best writers, from Dostoyevsky to Flannery O'Connor to Wendell Berry (of course), were masters of the short story.

But no one mastered the art of the short story better than our Lord Jesus. Beginning last week, we began a sequence in our lectionary with the parables of Jesus, particularly a collection of eight short parables told together. And take note, good reader, that Jesus told these by the sea, so some call this short story collection, 'The Seaside Parables.'

I love a collection of short stories where characters or places appear from one story to the next. Each short story stands on its own, but you experience the depth of the story when you read the whole collection, noticing characters, places, or themes that appeared in earlier stories.

Section 1

That's what's going on with today's parable, known as The Parable of the Weeds, or The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. You can learn about the Kingdom of God reading the Parable of the Weeds on its own, but you see much more of Jesus' wisdom when you read it with the parable we heard last week, The Parable of the Sower.

When Jesus told these stories in person, the disciples would have heard these parables in the same afternoon. It's kind of like we ought to imagine seeing a subtitle 'To be continued' appearing when we come to the end of The Parable of the Sower, which we heard last week. (Shows don't do 'to be continued' like they used to, but back in the day, that was an event at school and the water cooler, wasn't it?)

Well the Parable of the Weeds is a continuation of the Parable of the Sower. In the Parable of the Sower, we heard about Christ sowing the word of his Kingdom along four kinds of soil—soil along the path, the soil of rocky ground, soil infested with thorns, and finally, good, healthy dirt.

Today's parable continues the story of the seed planted on good dirt. The man who sowed seed in a good field looks out on a crop of wheat grain, healthy and strong, growing towards full maturity. But his servants report a big issue—there's a tall grass infesting his field. A grass called dandel, which looks nearly identical to a wheat stalk just before the wheat has fully ripened. Where the wheat grain becomes flour, filled with nutrients and protein, the dandel grass has poison when fully flowered. If

that gets mixed in with the harvest of wheat, when wheat gets milled to flour, that flour has become poisonous. No wonder the servants have this idea to pull up the dandel grass. As we know, though, the matter is more complicated.

Section 2

I understand the motivation of these servants. Every March our front garden is the sight of a siege. In our flower beds where I've planted hydrangeas, peonies, and rose, we have hundreds of wild onions infesting our garden. I asked our landscape designer, who's a Christian, for advice and he said a) he'd never seen an infestation like ours and b) he was stumped. Instead, he, the expert, asked me, "how did this happen?" That's when I quoted Jesus, "An enemy has done this."

I tried the organic route, vinegar and salt solution, but wild onions laugh at that stuff. I called the gardener's version of 911, which is the UT Extension service, and asked them what to do. I'm not a fan of pesticides, but even if I were so inclined, I learned from our esteemed Extension service that wild onions are amazingly resilient to such poisons. The only answer is "manual extraction"—aka pulling weeds—but even this has hazards. Bulbs break off when unearthed. This tiny bulbs reseed in the soil, preparing to greet me again next March.

I have learned two things in wild onion containment. One, pull them too quickly, they break off and get stronger at the bulb, multiplying. You have to pull them out slowly, after a decent rain, and when they've peaked. And two, you can't pull onions embedded in a hydrangea shrub. I've learned I gotta leave that cursed onion so that the root system of our hydrangeas stay in tact, producing flowers every spring.

On Logismoi

Our Lord Jesus said that the Enemy of God sows weeds in the world, which he describes as 'the causes of evil.' Elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel that phrase 'causes of evil' means 'temptation' or a trap of the Enemy.

Note well, saints of God, that the Enemy sows these temptations where the sons and daughters of the Kingdom have deep roots, where they are bearing fruit. These are the ones he couldn't snatch up along the path; these have endured the heat of some trials and even persecution; they're planted in good soil, free from thorns, resisting the cares of the world and the deceptiveness of wealth. Where he couldn't corrupt the soil at first because we have deep roots the Word of God, he sows new temptations to confuse us, distract us, frustrate us, and discourage us.

Some of the best wisdom we have about the nature of temptations comes to us from the desert fathers. Evagrius of Pontus was a 4th century father of the Egyptian desert who called the temptations of the mind 'logismoi.' *Logismoi* is a Greek word meaning 'intrusive, evil thoughts.' These thoughts are seedlings of temptations the Enemy sows in our minds. Evagrius teaches that there are eight deadly thoughts our Enemy sows most often in our minds: gluttony, lust, greed, despair, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride.

We cannot stop these temptations from coming. In fact, our Lord Jesus said in Matthew 18 that 'it is necessary that temptations come.' Naturally, we want to eliminate all these intrusive, dark thoughts from entering our minds, but as we heard St. Paul say in Romans 8, we live in a world that is in bondage to corruption. Both we and this whole creation wait with eager longing for full, final

freedom. But until that time comes, temptations will come because we live in a world still diseased by sin and death.

And our Lord says we cannot uproot all the temptations, all the traps and snares in this life. As our saints have said across the ages, we have not committed sin because temptation comes. Our Lord allows temptations to come because if we renounce these thoughts, we learn dependance on God alone. We grow in humility. We learn that we are *only* saved by the Name of Jesus Christ and the power of his Cross. This is why our Lord says don't uproot the weeds. Let them remain because if you try to eliminate these attacks or overcome them in your own strength, you will experience defeat or discouragement or both.

On Acedia

Among those eight thoughts that our Enemy has sown in the field of the world, I want to return to just one: the temptation of acedia. Acedia might be a new term for you, and it's somewhat difficult to define. The best description I've heard is that acedia is spiritual boredom, spiritual apathy. This is when spiritual things go bland—the spiritual blahs, or 'meh'. It's when reading Scripture feels like a slog, when procrastination delays prayer, when liturgy feels dull, no longer life-giving as it once was. If acedia gets a foothold in our souls, we become numb to the things of God.

It's difficult to be patient in the dry seasons of our spiritual lives. Heat waves and dog days don't just happen in July and August. They come to the soul, too. And when these days come, it's tempting to give in to restlessness. To seek change just to feel excitement again. // The Enemy sows acedia in our mind so we will uproot ourselves from the places of grace—from Scripture, from sacraments, from life together in the Church, from prayer, most of all. If you've ever had the thought of beginning to pray, and the *blah*spirit rises up against you, that's the temptation of acedia.

Why do I highlight acedia among the eight thoughts/temptations? Because I believe it's one of the main temptations of the 2020s—to feed our inner restlessness with other distractions. And we have more distractions, more technological advances than ever, yet there's a collective spirit of 'meh' in our time. Our devices, our feeds, our algorithms all want to give us relief and shelter from boredom. They're designed for instant impact, immediate emotional rewards, quick dopamine releases so we never have to wait for enjoyment. The problem, of course, is that our online culture forms us to be impatient.

Now I'm not here to go full Luddite on technology. Moderation in all things. What matters is listening to your heart in all things. It's asking: Why am I here? How *long* have I been scrolling? What does my soul really need today? If we are being formed by impatience, how will we learn to wait on the Lord, to love him, trust him, and remain faithful during the dry seasons of faith?

On Patience and Simplicity

The one who is rooted in Christ will learn to answer those questions walking by faith, not by feeling. By a desire of the heart that is deeper than any emotion.

And how do we do that? We stay put in the places of grace. Let those waves of restlessness wash over you, but stay rooted in the things of God. When the emotions fade (and they will)—whether with Scripture, with liturgy, with prayer—know that you have an opportunity. Yes, an *opportunity*. With every temptation, the Lord not only provides a way out, but an *opportunity* to draw near to Him; to mature in Christ. When the emotions fade with holy things, we have an opportunity to make a

sacrifice—to give God our presence, our attention, our praise, our worship when it doesn't benefit ourselves. And when we do that, that is a selfless gift of love. For it is more blessed to give than to receive.

When the spiritual blahs come on, it's also an opportunity to cultivate your attention. When I can't access warmth in my heart for the words I pray, I believe that my effort to focus my attention on the words of Scripture, the words of written prayers—this is my love for Christ. I'll struggle to focus my attention, but I believe even the struggle for attention is an act of love, a sacrifice of worship to the Lord. Simone Weil said, "Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer."¹

Know, my brother and sister, that we are not alone when we are tempted by acedia. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have endured all the intrusive thoughts, all the *logisomoi*, the temptations of the Evil One. We have a treasury of letters from St. John Chrysostom, writing to a deaconess, St. Olympia, in her struggles with despondency and acedia. In the midst of her trial, Chrysostom commended patience to Olympia saying:

*You know very well, that nothing is equal to patience; for this is most especially the queen of virtues, the foundation of right actions, the port without waves, peace in the midst of war, calm in the midst of billows, security in the midst of plots, rendering the one who has attained it to be stronger than steel.*²

Closing

And what are we patient for, beloved of God? We can be patient in all things and through all things because we have good reason. We can be patient in all things because the Lord's new creation is coming. The harvest will come one day. There is a glory that will be revealed to all who wait upon the Lord, who remain rooted in Him. Creation itself waits for saints to be fully clothed in righteousness; for that great day when sin is no more, when temptations *cease forever*, when we are gathered in the presence of God beholding his new creation. This is our hope and the reason for our patience. We do not see that great day of the harvest yet, but saints learn how to wait for things we do not see, do not feel. 'If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.'

So let us cling to the promise of that great and unending reward in all seasons. For you are God's field and he will return to bring us home into the presence of the Lord who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the only One who is worthy of all our love, all our praise, all our waiting. Amen.

¹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*.

² *Saint John Chrysostom, Letters to Saint Olympia*, ed. John Behr, trans. David C. Ford, vol. 56, *Popular Patristics Series* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 145.