

Gardens look beautiful this time of year, but only if someone makes them look that way. Once I tried to keep a small garden myself, but I quickly discovered something that surprised me. Gardening is work. You have to plant seeds, water the soil, pull up weeds, flick bugs, and scare away rabbits. Yes, you get beautiful flowers and tasty food at the end, but it is just too much work for me. My respect for gardeners and farmers has grown. It takes constant effort to drive away what is bad and preserve what is good.

We human beings are the flowers in God's garden. It takes constant effort for everyone to grow right. We get frustrated whenever it seems that God is not doing enough to drive away what is bad and preserve what is good. Even we can see plenty of weeds that God should uproot. At home, we have neighbors who are noisy or nosy, who invite suspicious friends, or who attract perpetrators of crime. Around the world, Israel and Hamas cannot maintain peace, Malaysia Airlines has suffered tragic losses, the abortion of innocent victims continues unchecked, and those who support the death penalty try to convince us that killing is a virtue. It would be simpler for us if God would simply weed the garden.

Jesus' parable indicates that God deliberately leaves the weeds alone. Removing them would harm the good crops. In warfare, that is called collateral damage. It resembles the chilling expression we use in English - to throw out the baby with the bathwater. How would the good be damaged if the evil were taken away? It would remove one of the greatest gifts we humans have received: free will. We have the right to choose good or evil. Without free will we would never sin, but we would never love, we would never excel. God so loves it when we choose to love him that he lets the weeds grow. At the end of time, God will punish the weeds and harvest good crops.

It's easy for us to see the weeds that sprout in our garden, weeds that threaten our security, our peace, and our life. But it's harder to see those occasions when we are the weeds in someone else's garden. At times God leaves us alone in hopes that we will make better choices.

Some of the difficult people we encounter may actually be doing us some good. They may train us to be stronger in our own commitments, more outspoken about our values, patient with those who are struggling, and humble about our own inadequacies. Sometimes the weeds make the rest of the garden a better crop. We await the blessed hope when God's angels will separate weeds from wheat at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, we pray for the gift of discernment, the proper use of our free will, so that we may one day gather again in the safety of God's barn.