

When the plants in my garden are young and tender, and I send one of my children out to destroy the weeds, always a question arises. Which are the weeds and which are the plants? Now to one who has gardened for many years, that might seem quite obvious. But for one who ~~as~~ has not learned to recognize the differences, ^{distinguishing} ~~knowing~~ the weeds from the plants is a most difficult task. And even after many years, I'm still never quite sure when I'm looking at a young carrot plant, ~~and~~ or one of those weeds whose top looks like a carrot but whose root is white, and not orange.

I'm 41 years old. I've been tending the garden that is my heart for as long as I can remember. Trying to nurture the plants that will bear good fruit, uprooting the weeds. I find that when I sneak a peek into ~~my neighbors~~ the garden that is my neighbor's heart it is so obvious which are the weeds, Why I am always tempted to reach right across the fence and pull them out. But in my own heart, that's another story. Which are the weeds, and which are the precious plants? I see my neighbor in need, a little shoot of wanting to ~~be~~ help ~~break~~ the surface in my heart. I say, "O, what a precious plant." So I water it, and fertilize it, and admire it as it grows. I give my time to my neighbor, or my money, and I feel so good. So right. Then something happens. My neighbor ~~wastes~~ wastes the money I gave, he tosses my precious advice into the trash, or maybe he climbs out of the pit only because he had my hand to grasp and he never says a word of thanks. He spits on me. Suddenly that plant that I have cared for so long bears its real fruit. Poison. Anger, Hatred, desire for revenge. What I had thought was love, true caring, is bitterness.

Now you say, "That's only natural. Anyone would react that way. I say, "Yes, that is just the sort of plant that comes from the seed of my human flesh.

Or another ~~plant~~ shoot breaks the surface, the desire to build up the church. Maybe in you it is the shoot called the desire to have a fine choir, or the desire to have large benevolence offerings, or the ~~evil~~ desire to have meaningful worship, or the desire to have a beautiful building, or a ~~strong~~ close

Bible Study circle. So we work, we devote ourselves, we nurture that plant, knowing it to be a good plant, a right plant, a pleasing to God plant. But someone stands in the way of our dream. A member of the Body of Christ becomes a barrier to our fine choir, our benevolence goals, our beautiful building, In my heart there is anger. The more my heart has been set to achieve my dream, the more I have sacrificed for it, the deeper the anger, the bitterness. So what ~~xxxxx~~ sort of a plant have I been tending?

You say, Its only natural to become angry with those who stand in the way of our dreams, I say, Yes, thats true.

In Jesus Christ God has not left us to ~~max~~ ^{what we are by} nature. Jesus promised,"I will pray the Father and ~~she~~ ^{he} will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him for he dwells ~~inxx~~ with you and will be in you.

And so Paul writes to us: But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you would.

The flesh is me. My mind, my trying, my doing, my desiring. Me, me, me. My flesh may dress itself in lawlessness. Fornication, impurity, drunkenness, selfishness, greed. Or it may ~~gross~~ ^{dress} itself up in what ~~xxxxxx~~ looks like religiousness, doing good deeds and helping my neighbors, so that even I am fooled into believing that there is love. But when things don't work out the way I want, I find that it was not love but pride, and superiority, that erupt in anger.

The flesh is me. Whether it be lawlessness, or religiousness, if I am at the center, doing my best, trying my hardest, demanding my way, the plant that grows in my heart is a weed. Not just when the anger erupts when things don't go my way, and my neighbor is the recipient of my anger, but all along the plant that looked so like love, like commitment, like good, that plant was a weed. For its seed is my flesh.

This morning, Paul is giving us a lesson in plant identification. On the weed side, the flesh side, I have focused on one sign, anger. When anger bursts forth in my heart, then it may well be time for some weed pulling, repentance. The same is true if it is envy or jealousy, or pride.

The good plants, the ^{fruits} ~~plants~~ that belong to the spirit that Jesus has poured into our hearts are these: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, selfcontrol.

Look into your heart. Right at this moment look. Look where no one else can see, but God alone. Look beyond the excuses and the blaming. Look beyond the pretending and trying. Look into your heart.

Is there joy there, like a pure sparkling water, fresh, pure? Love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things love that is not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude, not insisting on its own way? Is there peace in your heart, the ^{calm} ~~skam~~ of a deep blue lake. Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. If in the depths of your heart you find these, then praise God for his spirit. He has done a miracle in you.

If not, then its time to ^{plow} ~~plow~~ up the ground. Jesus taught, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its fruit. Where bitterness and anger and pride erupt, the tree is not good. It is of the flesh, and not of the spirit.

It is a hard thing to plow the ground. After all the nourishing and tending and trying. But the works of our flesh, will never produce good fruit.

God has given his only Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross, to free us from our flesh. Without Christ we are left with doing our best and trying our hardest. Our flesh. But when we were baptized into Christ, our flesh, our doing our accomplishing, were crucified with him, that we might now walk by the spirit. Day after day we are freed by Christ to repeat our baptism. We are freed to drown our flesh, to let it be crucified with Christ, in short to repent. To let go of me, and to grasp hold of Christ.

This day then clear the ground. Pull out all those weeds of doing your best and trying your hardest, and let the pirit of God plant his good trees in your heart. Day after day clear the ground, and God will cause to grow love and joy and peace and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, selfcontrol.

Walk by the spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.