

## **SPENDING TIME PULLING WEEDS**

**The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear the word of God, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced (Mark 4:18-19).**

I have spent a lot of time on my knees since May. I wish I could tell you that all this time on my knees has been spent praying. Unfortunately, most of the time spent has been pulling weeds out of the grass in my backyard.

After 10 years of neglect, weeds had taken over my backyard. Every year I tackled dandelions in my yard but left all the other weeds alone. Besides dandelions, I began to see lots of weeds that sprouted purple flowers on them, and lots of other weeds that would display yellow buds and white ones at times. Since late May I have been outside at least an hour a day, usually six days a week weather permitting pulling weeds with my trusty little tool in hand. Some weeds would have long deep roots. Others just had short roots. Some weeds seemed to spread across quite a large area.

When you have a 300-foot-deep lot it takes quite a while to pull weeds out of your grass. After each hour of pulling weeds I would go into the house all sweaty, with dirty knees, and have to go up and wash off in the bathtub. My two neighbours have been watching me faithfully doing this over the past 3 months. I do not know if they are impressed by my perseverance or think I am crazy. Every time they are outside when I am weeding, they will comment, "You are at it again are you Dean!"

Being on my knees so much this summer pulling weeds has given me a lot of time to think. Naturally, it got me thinking about the parable Jesus told of the four soils. This parable can be found in 3 of the 4 gospels (Matthew 13: 1-9; Mark 4: 1-25; and Luke 8: 4-8). After Jesus finished telling the parable the disciples came to Him later and asked Him what it meant. He explained how the farmer plants seed by taking God's word to others:

- The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have Satan come along at once and take it away
- The seeds that fell on rocky soil represent those who hear the message and are joyful at first but because they don't have deep roots the truth of the message does not last long.

- The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear God's word but all too quickly it is crowded out by the worries of life.

It was when I was reminded of this moment in the parable while weeding, that I began to wonder if COVID-19 has caused weeds to grow in our spiritual lives. We have had a lot of seeds thrown our way filled with messages during this pandemic:

- Stay at home if you can,
- Social distance,
- Wear a mask,
- The number of cases is rising again,
- Things may not return to normal,
- Expect a possible second wave.

COVID-19 may have planted seeds of fear, or doubt, or lack of faith or anger, or grief or perhaps disobedience. Just as weeds can take over our gardens and lawns, they can take over our emotional and spiritual well being as well. Jesus went a step further in His parable by saying these weeds can choke out of us the good meant by God's word and our ability to use our talents for Him. If all of these seeds thrown our way by our politicians and medical experts during COVID-19 have caused these kinds of weeds to grow in our heart, then maybe we will need to spend the rest of the summer pulling these weeds out of our lives. As we begin the journey to do so, we may find (like I have in my backyard experience) that:

- Some roots are harder to dig out than others,
- It is wiser to focus on a smaller section each time, so that we do not become overwhelmed.
- We will have to stay disciplined each day at the task at hand,
- Just when we think we have gotten all the weeds in one area, we will look back and see ones we missed,
- And if we didn't remove the root properly, a week or two later, we will see it has grown back

It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to remove weeds, whether it is from our gardens and lawns or from our lives. My two neighbours tell me they have given up getting all the weeds out of their backyards. I haven't given up. Nor should we ever give up when it comes to removing the

weeds from our spiritual lives. We might be surprised by what God does as we spend time and effort removing these weeds that are choking out His word and truths in us. With fewer weeds to deal with we might find ourselves seeing and noticing a seed God has successfully planted in our heart. That is what happened to me the very morning I sat down to write this message.

At 7:00 a.m. I was outside weeding my backyard. I asked God as I was doing it what should be this week's mid-week message to the congregation. The more and more weeds I pulled, the more and more God put this message on my heart. Isn't this exactly what Jesus said would happen when we remove the weeds from our lives?

So, if all the messages about COVID-19 has caused negative or damaging weeds to sprout up in you, join me this summer in getting on your knees to work at the task of weeding. Three months of doing this in my backyard is allowing me to see the fruits of my labour. Parts of my lawn are looking so much better, while other parts need some grass seed planted in the fall. It's a process and a journey to rid my lawn of these weeds. It's the same to rid our lives of the weeds affecting God's Word from taking a firm hold of our hearts. But do it, we should.

Keep Safe & God Bless,

Pastor Dean