

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, July 21, 2020
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Bitter Roots”

READING: Hebrews 12: 14-17, 28 – Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears...Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

My nephew, John, bought Dad’s farm some years ago, and he is now growing organic crops of beans and corn. It’s sort of a kick for me, because when I was just a boy, we pretty much were doing organic farming and didn’t know it! We fertilized with manure and did weed control with cultivation and manual hoes. (If you had told me then that farmers would someday pay hundreds of dollars per ton for manure, I would have laughed out loud and told you that you were nuts!)

Because John is farming organically, weeds cannot be controlled with chemical herbicides, so weeds are a problem. When we were out at the farm at the time of Dad’s funeral, the soybean field west of the house had a redroot problem. Redroots are a prolific weed that can get 3-4 feet tall, with a very deep tap root, and the ability to drink up water and nutrients at an alarming rate. And, were they ever thick! John had hired migrant workers from Texas to hoe that field, and all of us “older folks” felt sorry for them out in that field because we all remembered all too well doing that job in just that kind of heat and with just that many redroots on that sandy rise in that field.

We also commented on the hope that not only were they hoeing out those redroots, but that they were also chopping them into pieces! By long experience we knew that if you just pulled a redroot out or hoed it out with some of its roots intact, those dad-burned things would drive their roots back into the soil and keep right on growing and going to seed. They might be lying on their sides, but that would not keep them from continuing to cause trouble and spreading their seeds to plague the farmer the next spring, too. They have to be chopped into four or five pieces, especially the root ends. If you don’t eradicate them, they come right back.

In our text for today the writer to the Hebrews says essentially the same thing about immorality, ungodliness, and a lax appreciation for the grace of God. He says, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God, and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” He is well aware how sin sinks its roots into the souls of people and leads to all manner of defilement. Just like those redroots in John’s fields, sin is something that has to be

mastered and removed, roots and all, or it continually reestablishes itself and continues to grow and spread its poison. That job is continuous, and one that we cannot rely on our own “goodness” to complete. It is a job that requires the Word of God, the Sacraments, and the work of the Holy Spirit to accomplish. Every day you and I confess our sinfulness before God. Every day we come to him in prayer and ask for his resources. And, every day he forgives us and aids us in striving for godliness. It’s an on-going effort, but one that produces the fruits of the Spirit that we and others might live in blessedness and thanksgiving.

Here’s the sad news for John: that field is going to look pretty nice for a time. The weeds will be gone, and with the rains they received last week, those soybeans will shoot skyward. But my experience tells me that before too long, something other than beans will start to show itself in that field. It’ll be redroots! Some of them will have been missed by the hoers, and some of them will have re-rooted themselves and made a comeback. He’ll probably have to hire those folks again to go back and hit them a second time. That’s the nature of weeds on the farm, and that’s also the nature of sin in our lives. We can never be complacent. We can never say, “I am holy.” We can never say, “What a good boy or girl I am!” Always, confession. Always, repentance. And always, leaning upon God’s grace through Jesus Christ, our Lord. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S): Pastor Ron Richeson, retired and former pastor at Faith, Louisville, will be leading the worship at this Saturday’s service. Becky and I will be heading back from a week in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. I asked Pastor Richeson to cover for me so I didn’t have to be back on Saturday by a set time. One just never knows what the weather or road will bring. I’ll have the services on Sunday. Pastor Woods will be gone for two weeks on his summer vacation. God bless you all.