

Dandelions and Nard (There are no Weeds in God's Garden)
Lethbridge Mennonite Church: March 21, 2010
Isaiah 43:16-21 and John 12:1-8

Today is the first day of spring! Apart from the date, there are two signs that spring has arrived: I've heard robins chirping, and I've seen the first green dandelion leaves sprouting in our flower beds at home. No doubt there is a warm and sunny corner in Lethbridge where the first dandelions have already started to bloom.

When you see a dandelion blooming, what do you see?

I haven't met a 2 year old child yet who doesn't think that handfuls of freshly picked, bright yellow dandelions aren't the perfect bouquet for their mother or father. And who among us doesn't have a childhood memory of happily watching the soft white dandelion seeds float away after we've blown on that perfectly round globe the yellow flower turns into overnight?

Jim Moyer has spent a good chunk of his adult life studying the dandelion which explains why he is still so young at heart. When he sees a dandelion he sees one of the most amazing and resilient plants on the surface of the earth.

When organic gardeners look at dandelions they see the earliest pollen food source for aphid eating ladybugs, which means they'll have fewer problems with aphids on their plants later on in the spring and summer. They also appreciate the dandelions long root which aerates the soil and brings important minerals closer to the surface

When nutritionists look at a dandelion, they see an incredibly rich source of vitamins and minerals. Not only is single serving (55 grams) of dandelion leaves high in dietary fibre and incredibly low on the glycemic index, it also provides you with 535% of your daily requirement of Vitamin K, 112% of your Vitamin A, 10% of your calcium, 9% of your iron and Vitamin E, as well as Folate, Magnesium, Phosphorous, Copper, Thiamine, Riboflavin, Potassium, Manganese. The root is also nutritious with vitamins A, C, D, and B complex, not to mention high levels of zinc, iron, and potassium.

But what do most of us see? A weed! Oh no, the first dandelion! Get out the weed-diggers, weed and feed, chemicals and sprayers, or make the call to the lawn maintenance company to come out and make the first service call of the year. A dandelion isn't beautiful, amazing, good for the earth or good to eat. It's something to get rid of.

Billions of dollars are spent in North America in a largely futile effort to get rid of the dandelion in our lawns and gardens. Why isn't the money given to poor people instead? This is Judas' question in the gospel story today. It's a very good question when asked with a heart filled with love. It's not such a good question when asked with a heart filled with judgement and greed.

When you watch Mary anointing Jesus' feet with what would today be a \$20,000.00 bottle of perfume, what do you see?

Can you see Mary's brother, Lazarus, who Jesus had recently raised from the dead, smiling and eating and talking at the table? Can you see Mary's overwhelming joy and gratitude as she washes her friend and saviour's feet with something far more precious than water?

Can you see the beautiful expression of love so rich in symbolism? In Jewish culture, the feet of the dead, and the heads of the living, were anointed. In less than a week, Jesus would be dead. Jesus knew, even if Mary did not, that they were anointing each other. By anointing his feet, Mary was blessing and foretelling his crucifixion. Then, by wiping his feet with her hair, she was effectively anointing her head, foretelling how her life would be blessed by the imminent death and resurrection of Jesus.

Judas saw none of this as he watched. He saw money draining into the ground. As a crooked accountant, he saw a lost financial opportunity for himself. As a political pragmatist he saw a lost opportunity to gain political power by making a grand financial gesture to the poor. He saw yet another example of how Jesus was not only politically impractical, but a political liability and began working with the Chief Priests to figure out a way to get rid of Jesus for good.

Judas saw only what was wrong. He had little compassion for the poor, and he judged the rich and the extravagance of Mary. He only saw the weeds he figured needed getting rid of. Eventually he classified Jesus as a weed too and conspired to kill Jesus with energy at least as great as the energy we put into killing dandelions.

But Jesus saw the good. He saw the nutrients that supported life. He knew that the seeds of poverty are as numerous as the seeds of dandelions, and that no amount of money would eradicate poverty completely. But here was something more important than money and the eradication of poverty. Here, anointing his feet with ridiculously expensive perfume was a heart full of love and gratitude for the gift of life.

When Jesus looks at us, what does he see?

He sees it all, of course. The good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the dandelions that are where they're supposed to be and the dandelions that need to be dug out or sprayed. But what matters most to Jesus is the good. What is precious to Jesus is the love, most of which is weighed down and obscured by the pain and sin in our lives.

When Jesus lived on the earth he didn't make any poor person fantastically rich, nor did he cause any rich person to become poor. He didn't instigate political change or supervise the reorganization of the social and economic structures of the day. What did Jesus do? Very simply, he treated absolutely no one like a weed. He met each person in love exactly where they were at, and then invited them to grow towards wholeness in exactly the way they needed to grow. He wasn't always gentle about it, but he never acted from a place of fear and hate.

It's so easy to be critical, to judge the poor, to judge the rich, and in the process to consider both the rich and the poor as being someone other than us. But Jesus said that the poor will always be with us. If the poor are always with us, so will the rich. This is a social, political, and economic reality. But it is also a deeply personal one. Each of us are rich and poor at the same time, strong and weak, full of incredible life and potential, as well as destructive dysfunction and pain. Kind of like a dandelion. But Jesus doesn't look at us or treat us like a weed. He meets us in love just as we are and calls us to wholeness in just the way we need to be called. He won't always be gentle about it, but he will never act out of fear and hate. In as much as I can believe that Jesus wants to love both my poverty and my riches to wholeness, I can start meeting people where they are with a little less judgement, a little more love, living a life that's an invitation to wholeness that's just a little more authentic.

Do we believe that this is how much God love me, loves you? Not just paying lip service to it, but knowing it in those places that are deeper than words so that when I'm in my moments of fear and despair, when the future isn't clear, when I'm not sure how I'll get through the day, the fact that God loves me and doesn't think I'm a weed is strength enough to take the next step, and then the step after that.. This is the gift of faith that God desires to give to each of us.

Mary spilled her treasure on the feet of Jesus. Jesus spilled his treasure on the earth from the cross less than a week later. None of it was wasted – not a drop of perfume or a drop of blood was spilled in vain because they were spilled in love. So let's allow Jesus to meet us where we are so that we can experience his love and know we're not a weed in his sight, so we can love him back and start seeing a little more clearly God's world and God's people through his eyes.