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**First Congregational Church of Westfield**  
**Sermon July 23, 2023**

Weeds into Wine

Where are my gardeners? What are some of your garden enemies? As I have told you, I am not among your numbers. However, I know enough about gardens to the point where weeds are not desirable among your plants. At first, I thought it was because they didn't look so nice with the plants. Then I learned that weeds can grow and choke the plant at its roots to cause it to die. Perhaps we need to look at weeds in different ways.

**WEEDS TO BE BURNED**

When Jesus explains the parable of the weeds, he tells them that they should be left there and harvested with the plants. In Matthew's Gospel passage, Jesus tells his listeners that the weeds could then be separated from the harvest and burned in the fire. The original hearers right away would think of Gehenna, which was, for lack of a better term, the city dump where trash would be burned on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Depending on the direction of the wind, the odor from Gehenna could be smelled from within the city walls. Sometimes, however, weeds can be repurposed for other things.

“DANDELIONS ARE EVIL AND MUST BE DESTROYED.” Matt

One of our neighbors, Matt, is passionate about his lawn. While Mark has done some great things with our yard, Matt is meticulous about his lawn. Matt also takes care of his neighbor's lawn as the neighbor is older and can longer keep it the way he would like it. As Matt lives at the end of our “one exit” street, we see him at all hours of the day on his riding lawn mower with his hat and cigar as he works to keep his yard just so. I can tell you that there

is not one dandelion or weed anywhere on that lawn. Golf courses should be so lucky to have Matt as their landscaper.

We love to chat with him as we drive or walk by the house. Matt is always willing to share a story, a drink, and some advice about how to keep the perfect lawn. One day I confessed my love for dandelions. You would have thought I had professed my love for pavement instead of lawns! Matt's response was "Dandelions are evil and must be destroyed!" While we got a chuckle out of the delivery, we were convinced that Matt was sincere. But I also thought, "How could something so little and colorful be thought of as evil?"

## FLOWERS AND WINE

I have always thought that dandelions were beautiful. We used to pick them and bring them to my mother. God love her, she didn't tell us to get those weeds out of her house. What she did do was find a little cup with water and put them in there. Even when they wilted and were pretty much dead, she didn't throw them away until there was no hope left for them.

We also discovered a whole other purpose for dandelions. The DiNicolas lived across the street. The grandparents, known to the whole neighborhood as Nana and Nano, lived on the first floor. Tom, their youngest son, lived with his family on the second floor. One of Tom's hobbies was to make dandelion wine. It was the first alcohol we ever tried as kids. We kids, except for the DiNicolas, thought it was just awful while the adults loved it. Sometimes, weeds can be turned into wine. Here is a recipe and directions for making dandelion wine.

<https://www.thespruceeats.com/how-to-make-dandelion-wine-1327932>

ALL WEEDS ARE BAD?

If we take today's Gospel reading word for word, we are left with the idea that all weeds are bad. As we have just seen, some weeds are salvageable and can be turned into something purposeful. For those who look at the reading and think that all of the people whom we might consider to be weeds are going to burn after they have been harvested. I think that all weeds can be repurposed into something productive and useful, even if they become fertilizer to help others grow. We sometimes look down on the less fortunate among us; why are they so needy? Why can't they help themselves?

These folks, even some of our neighbors here at church, give us the opportunity to help them and to teach them to help themselves. They might look like weeds to you, but don't you think they will be counted among the harvest at the end? Last month I asked if we all subscribed to the line that "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here?" Most people nodded their heads in affirmation. I want to remind you that this means *everyone*, even those who some people might think of as "weeds."

We have to be careful in our approach to the earth and to those who inhabit it. Some weeds are actually part of the harvest. Other weeds can be repurposed into something good. Don't be so quick to toss the weeds into the fire. Some weeds can become fine wine.

