

“You fight the fights that need fighting!” If you’ve seen *The American President* that quote might sound familiar, you might even be able to hear Martin Sheen perfectly in your head, the way he articulates the line with force and determination, an unwillingness to back down from his best friend, even if that best friend happens to be the President of the United States. If you haven’t seen it, a wee bit of context here. Martin Sheen is the chief of staff to Michael Douglas’ president who decides that the best time to start dating a Washington lobbyist is like six months before his reelection. On top of that it’s the perfect time for his gun control legislation to go toe to toe with said girlfriend’s fossil fuel legislation.

Now, even though this movie came out like 25 years ago, the cycle of politics is the same...the media and his competitors just have a field day with this, and what drives most of his staff completely bonkers is that he refuses to step up to the plate and challenge what’s being said about him. He just kind of sits on the sidelines letting it play out, hoping the news cycle will burn itself out and everyone will move on to the next story, but that doesn’t happen. Eventually, over a game of pool, Martin Sheen pushes him, go after his opposition, speak up, defend himself, don’t let the other guy keep being the only one talking, and Michael Douglas just kind of shrugs his shoulders and says, “You fight the fights you can win, AJ.” Basically just

saying he can't win a fight that is determined to just tear down his character at every last turn, and Martin Sheen just loses it. "You fight the fights that need fighting!" Sure, some fights aren't worth it and they're a waste of time, energy, and focus, but others are absolutely worth the battle, worth the effort. In the end, you have to figure out which weeds are worth wrestling with, and which are best left to do their own thing.

So, Jesus is in a bit of a parable mood it would seem. His context hasn't changed from last week to this week. He's still in the same boat, surrounded by the same crowds that followed him down to the lakeshore when he was trying to find a few minutes of peace and quiet. He's still dealing with people who know the ins and outs of farming and harvesting and they seem to be paying attention so he keeps teaching them, but this time, he's shifting from talking about seeds to talking about weeds.

Here we have a sower that knows what he's doing when it comes to planting. He goes out and he sows his good seed diligently in his fields, wholly anticipating a good and decent harvest when the time comes. Yet, unbeknownst to him, in the middle of the night someone sneaks into his fields bent upon sabotage, sowing weeds wildly amongst his wheat. Eventually, as the plants start to grow, his harvesters start to raise their eyebrows a bit, questioning the sanity of their sower, because umm didn't he

plant good seed? What's up with all the weeds? Now the sower seems to know what's up, he knows what has happened and he actually seems pretty calm about it. But the harvesters are earnest, should we go out and pull the weeds? A task you will never see me readily volunteer for like that.

Anyway, they think there's a logical solution here. They can go out, pull up the weeds, and it will make the harvest more manageable, the wheat will have more room to grow. Yet, in pure Jesus fashion, this parable takes a weird turn. The sower says no, leave the weeds. Again, advice I would adore to get when it came to my own flower beds. It seems like weird guidance, and yet his logic is sound. There are so many weeds and they have grown up so entangled with the wheat that if they tried to pull up all the weeds, they'd end up doing irreparable damage to the wheat in the process. It's better to let it all grow together, so that when the harvest does come, they can separate them out and the wheat will be whole and productive. It'll all work out if they leave the fields be, the weeds will eventually be taken care of and there will be wheat aplenty for the harvest.

Now, as much as the logic kind of makes sense, the disciples still aren't really sure what any of this has to do with the kingdom of God, so when the day is over and they get back to the house where they're all staying, the disciples just ask Jesus point blank to explain. What was all that

business about weeds and wheat and what does it have to do with the kingdom you're calling us to preach? And Jesus just lays it out for them. The fields are the whole world, God's beautiful creation where we all reside, and God has gone out and sown us as good seed, but there is unshakeable evil in this world that is bent on sowing itself and nestling its roots into the soil and growing. Eventually, at the end of the ages, God and the angels will take care of the separation of the weeds, the evil, from the wheat, the good. They will take care of sin and evil at the time of the harvest, and it will be dealt with according to God's intentions.

So basically, at the end of the day, the heart and soul of the parable of the weeds and the wheat is that the weeding out of sin and evil is not our job. It's God's. And that can ultimately be a deeply freeing message and one that I think we all deeply need to hear, because let's be honest, we spend a lot, and I do mean *a lot* of our time down in the weeds, as it were, of our neighbor's sins. We poke and prod and investigate and are bound and determined to point out every single little sin that they're guilty of and pointing out all the reasons why they need to deal with it or why they're a bad person because of that one sin that *we* have deemed worse than others. We are deeply invested in the sin of others and wildly uninterested in our own. We would rather focus on pointing at others and telling them what

they have done wrong than focusing either on our own sin and how we need to confess that and change it or simply on our own growth, on striving to be the best piece of wheat we can be. Seeking to thrive and grow and bring love and hope and grace into the world because that's who we've been called to be and that's what we've been called to cultivate in our own hearts and in the world around us. So yes, we need this message, the business of other's sins is not our business. It's not our job. It's not where our focus should be. It's not what we should be trying to harvest. At the end of the day, the message is simple, STOP WEEDING!! And start growing and let the rest take care of itself.

Yet...I struggle a bit here...I've struggled all week with this, and thus found myself standing in Martin Sheen's shoes declaring that we fight the fights that need fighting. Because the dark side of this parable is that it can far, far too quickly lead to a call to apathy and complacency. You can run with this parable to the point of looking around at all the sin and all the evil in this world and just being like, "Whelp, nothing to be done about this. Jesus will take care of it in the end," and just walking away leaving the world rife with injustice, oppression, and heartbreak. And I just can't justify that kind of message with the people that Jesus has called us to be, people who strive to love our neighbor as ourselves, to feed the hungry and clothe

the naked and care for the lost and lonely, to lift up those who have been downtrodden and forgotten, to speak up when the world flies in the face of love and grace and acceptance of our siblings for who they are. I just can't help but feel like there are some weeds that are worth pulling...

So I'm trying to find a middle ground in the midst of it all because I can't reconcile a parable that could be turned into Jesus giving us all an excuse to not fight against racism, xenophobia, sexism, White supremacy, homophobia, and every other deep rooted and infectious weed that seems to have knit itself into the field of our current world. And no, maybe we will never fully weed those things out, maybe ultimately they will have to be taken care of at the end of the age, but I can't fathom a parable that says we just stop trying and leave them be to grow. That just doesn't sound like the people we are called to be, the disciples we've been called to be, the kingdom we've been called to help grow.

So what's my middle ground? Honestly, I think I'm still trying to figure it out. But I think it has something to do with where we place our focus. Far, far too often we spend our time weeding out the tiny, little insignificant things in our neighbor's world. We nitpick their language or their identity or the decisions they make and we sit in lofty judgment over them, when none of those things necessarily have any bearing on the growth

of God's kingdom. We spend all our time and energy focusing on the teeny, tiny weeds, and we stop focusing on our own growth, on our place in the field where we've been called to grow and thrive and help make the kingdom the most loving, Christlike place it can be. We would rather talk about how others need to grow and change, than dealing with how we ourselves need to do the same thing. So maybe that's the kind of weeding we need to set aside and say no, no, we'll leave that up to Jesus, while the big time weeding, the heavy duty, hard hitting, world impacting weeding, maybe we keep trying a little bit, fully cognizant of the fact that we might never really get that weed pulled up but we can say we tried to make it a little weaker, a little less powerful.

At the end of the day, yes, we do fight the fights that need fighting, because our world, the lives of our siblings are too valuable to leave to the ravages of feisty weeds that threaten to cut off their growth. So we stand up against the weeds that would seek to darken our fields, and we forgive the tiny weeds that barely reach our ankles. We settle our own roots deep and we strive to grow and thrive and shed light and love and grace into a world that is in desperate need of it. Some weeds are worth struggling with, some weeds just need to be ignored. Some fights are better walked away from, but in the end some are just flat out worth fighting. **AMEN!!!**