

## Reflection on Matthew 13:24–30

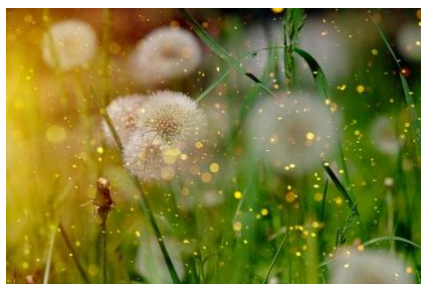
Rev. Christine Gilbert for the St. Andrew's by the Sea Uniting Church

An advertisement on the radio caught my attention recently with the familiar sound of dice being shaken in a Yahtzee cup. “Yay! I got two sixes!” exclaims a woman, presumably the mother. The ad goes on to highlight the many joys we’ve rediscovered over these months like playing classic board games, spending more time with family and refinancing our home mortgages, obviously!

Away from the motives of the advertising world, many would agree that some positives have come from our restricted movement and travel, from a simpler, less busy existence. But, of course, it hasn’t been all fun and games. As the immediate future remains foggy and the news continues to blurt out dire health and economic predictions, we might feel a bit like the slaves in the Gospel parable: *Where did these weeds come from?!* Virtually overnight, our plans and hopes have been overtaken by a reality not of our design or choosing.

Our lack of busyness has potentially brought us home to ourselves as well. Within the introspective space solitude affords, we may have discovered that here, too, exists a combination of weeds and wheat. This can be a confronting actuality to face, a truth many of us spend a great deal of energy avoiding and even more energy attempting to disguise from others. As understandable as this response might be—and appropriate at times—I hear a more life-giving way on offer in the Gospel.

The parable invites us to learn to *rest comfortably* with the weeds and wheat. This mysterious mixture is the way things are for now.



As the Gospel so clearly puts it, attempting to pull out that which we perceive to be regrettable, unpleasant or even “bad” will destroy the goodness and love at the same time.

But even more than acceptance, experience reveals that this mixture of light and shadow can be a source of fertility, the healthy inner ecology necessary for growth. As John O’Donohue puts it, contradictions are “a creative force within the soul.” Through their “turbulence and conflict” they can bring “an integrity of transfiguration.” In other words, the interplay between opposites cultivates change—change that is not on the surface alone, like moving from one house to another, but *transfiguration* that leads over a lifetime to authenticity.

A story from my own experience might provide a concrete example. When I was on retreat at the Benedictine Abbey in Jamberoo NSW last year, I became aware of feelings of grief and regret. “What is this about?” I wondered. I took these feelings to Sr Joanna who was my Spiritual Director for the retreat and, in her gentle way, she began to draw out stories that helped me identify the root of my feelings.

At the end of 2010 when Sean and I made the decision to merge our lives, my focus turned to the practicalities of making this big move happen. Ever before me was my love for Sean and the hope of our life together. But this attention on what was emerging meant the grief of what and who I was leaving behind went largely unattended. Experiencing these more difficult feelings would have made the move nearly impossible for me, so I buried them beneath excitement and activity.

In the silence of the retreat, some of these harder emotions were bubbling up. By allowing them to rise and choosing to notice and feel everything, Sr Joanna was helping me to accept that life is not comprised of this-or-that and either/or. I can see and give thanks for the goodness of my decision to be transplanted in this land *and* I can grieve the landscape of my birth, the ease of being familiar within a culture and its history and, most especially, the ability to enjoy and care for my mom in her final chapter of life.

When I returned home, I wrote my mom a letter, sharing my regret at leaving her and the sadness I feel by our separation. She responded with a heartfelt letter of her own. Our exchange does not lessen the grief, but the spiritual work and God's grace reflected in it makes it possible for me to find a greater peace with the mixture of this aspect of my life.

More significantly, learning to live *creatively* with the unresolvable has allowed me to embrace more completely my present. The effort we put into pushing down or hiding—whether consciously or unconsciously—that which is difficult, awkward, unseemly or distasteful takes away from our investment in the real, the right here and right now.

Perhaps we are aware of some of the weedy stuff that has poked through during the quieter, less busy weeks the pandemic brought early on. Like the grass that creeps over the garden borders, those parts of ourselves we normally keep reigned in have made themselves known, most likely impacting on our mental and spiritual well-being, our relationships and our joy. What are we to do?

The temptation is to look away, to try to rebury or remove such things as quickly as possible. This will be easy to do now that our days can be filled with activity and distraction again. But at what cost? And more

importantly, what healing and growth are waiting for us if we choose to accept the strange mixture that we are and work with it?

What makes this more possible is a *felt knowledge and deepening trust* that we are fully accepted *as we are*. The Source of our life gazes upon us with a gentle light that sees us in our entirety and delights in us utterly. We have no reason to fear the inward look, the honest insight, a willing self-awareness. For by taking the inward path, we encounter a love that is able to weave together our disparate parts into a meaningful whole that is uniquely us.



Even though in many ways this is quiet, hidden and relatively “small” work—not the stuff of headlines or civic awards—making time for the inner journey is far from irrelevant or self-centred. To be awakened to the divine, to be at peace rather than at war with one's self and others, to find freedom to be amidst the weeds and wheat of life, holds tremendous promise. For the inner journey always leads outward in richer, truer loving.

So, may we be those with ears to hear and may we have the courage to listen. Whether we find our solitude during our morning walks or runs, while bobbing in a kayak or sitting in the sun with a cup of tea, may this blessing by O'Donohue encourage and lead us along the way.



### A Blessing of Solitude

by John O'Donohue

May you recognise in your life  
the presence, power and light of your soul.

May you realise that you are never alone  
that your soul in its brightness and belonging  
connects you intimately  
with the rhythm of the universe.

May you have respect  
for your own individuality and difference.

May you realise that the shape of your soul is unique,  
that you have a special destiny here  
that behind the façade of your life  
there is something beautiful,  
good and eternal happening.

May you learn to see yourself  
with the same delight, pride and expectation  
with which God sees you in every moment.