

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH – HAMLIN, PENNSYLVANIA
THE REV'D. RONALD R. MILLER'S SERMON
JULY 23, 2017 – SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Yesterday, I spoke about the dandelion: how I, as a child, used to pick them for my mother. Then, how, in adult life, she would pick the first one she saw every Spring and send it to me in a note. [I, by the way, still have those notes!] I did the same thing, as recently as the day before I returned home from Europe, a little more than a week ago. I picked a dandelion in Bayeux, in Normandy, in France (near the site of the D-Day invasions) and brought it home to send to Mary Krueger, because I have re-initiated that custom with her. Then, I remembered a festive Easter dinner in our home for which James - typically and wonderfully - had produced a fabulous meal. My Godfather uncle and his wife — who grew up in Lititz, of Moravian background, where she attended Linden Hall, where, in addition to her capable mother's training, she well and truly learned home economics — were visiting. Before dinner, she went outside and spent time, bent over in the lawn, picking fresh, young dandelion greens to add to our meal. Every Pennsylvania Dutchman knows that fresh young dandelion greens are delicious and nourishing.

Just this week I visited George and Bernice Sink with Eileen and Pete Eddins. I was impressed and moved by the love and candor which characterized the very straightforward talk about the end of life issues George is facing at the moment: a trip to the funeral director, etc. And I remembered my friend and seminary classmate, John Cox, who died of AIDS in 1988. I recall saying to him in my youthful flippancy: "Well, John, we are all going to die." To which John responded in his beautiful North Carolinian accent: "Yes, but I am REALLY gonna die!" As I bade farewell to Bernice, on Friday, there was a dandelion, blooming right beside my parked car. I picked it, turned around and gave it to her. I told her then that there was one of these at the bottom of each of my parent's graves.

To some, the dandelion is a weed. ChemLawn wages war against the dandelion [poisoning the earth and the water supply beneath while doing so]. They know that the dandelion is a weed.

I know the dandelion to be something quite other than a weed. Dandelions were the first gift I was able to give to the person who gave me life and loved and nourished me into existence. The dandelion is a symbol of a child's uncultivated but sincere affection. The dandelion is a nourishing food for some - those with the palate to appreciate its flavor. The dandelion is even used by some to make wine [any sacramental implication there?]
Dandelions are universally and freely available: they are there for all to appreciate and all to share and enjoy. Dandelions are also indiscriminately sown. There's nothing I like better in the autumn than to blow one of those grey feathery globes - a dandelion, gone to seed - to liberate the next generation of dandelions to inform and encourage and to become symbols of the unimaginable, unspeakable and unlimited love of the God who created that wonderful weed in the first place.

I am sure that there are many to whom I am just a weed. I rejoice that for some — to my parents and God — I am seen for what it is I really am. A weed to be sure, but not a weed without value. I have learned that a weed is fully capable of being seen as beautiful, of being shared, of being nourishing, even intoxication, and of lying at the bottom of the graves of this life and in this world as a sign of the universal love of God, and the hope that love brings into our lives and this world.

The Gospel says one thing clearly. You [*speaking words to the church which it probably does not want to hear*] simply do not know the difference between wheat and tares. You do not really know what a weed is - and what vegetation might be valuable in the sight of God: ChemLawn notwithstanding. So mind your own business or you'll ruin God's intention for His fields and gardens which are not like yours... We thought about what a terribly wasteful sower of seed God was last week. [Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23] Let us consider what a terrible husbandman God is of the fields which we imagine would be better if every other plant which was not like we are were up-rooted and thrown into the fire. According to the Gospel, today, [Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43] I guess our job is simply to grow and flourish where it is we are planted and to develop and bear fruit as God intends. What is planted next to us is God's concern, and God's concern alone. We, I supposed, need to learn that we are the planted not the planter. I simply cannot imagine a world without dandelions.....Can you?

The Rev'd. Ronald R. Miller, Ph.D.
Priest-in-Charge