

Wednesday July 1, 2015

Weeds don't listen to orders

By Jim Taylor

I've come late to gardening. Most of my life, I've assumed that I did the manly stuff – mowing the lawn, pruning the trees, tilling the soil – while someone else did the weeding and deadheading.

But life has changed. My someone else is no longer physically capable of spending several hours a day pulling weeds.

And so I've learned two things. First, that weeds do not submit gladly to external control. And second, that whoever invented the Christian doctrine of the Second Coming was not a gardener.

The notion that at some future moment, Jesus will return to earth and – poof! – bring all things under his divine control clearly does not take weeds into consideration.

Maybe it's my cerebral limitation, but I cannot imagine weeds obeying orders from anyone. Not even from God incarnate.

In a Bible study group, some years ago, a woman assured me that when the time was right, Jesus would return to earth, abolish all evil, and reign in peace and justice forever.

“How's he going to do that?” I asked, irreverently. “By turning us all into zombies?”

She had no answer.

Because, in reality, the only way to eliminate all evil is to take over total control. From us. And over us. Over everything, in fact. Over minds that occasionally stray into thoughts of jealousy or vengeance. Also over cats that hunt mice. And over trees that block sunlight from seedlings.

Even over weeds that persist in growing where they're not wanted.

The end-times vision

The book of Revelation is most explicit about the Second Coming. After a series of cosmic battles that make Star Wars look like a kiddies' tea party, Jesus will triumph over the forces of evil and take over the government of the earth. Forever.

In one sense, it's a glorious vision. God will live among us. Death and pain will be no more. The tree of life will provide food year round.

But it's an exclusive vision. Only the faithful will get to enjoy it. “The cowardly, the faithless, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur...”

It was also an exclusively human-related vision. A new authority would replace the Roman emperor and his legions of enforcers. A new ruler would change the rules. Everyone would obey, or else.

There was no sense of humans as part of a larger environment – which would include lions and lambs, salmon and zebra mussels, radishes and runner beans...

And weeds.

Most other references to the Second Coming are less explicit than Revelation. They merely say, more or less, “I will come again.”

The early Christian church took the promise literally. They expected Jesus to arrive on the next bus.

By the time later sections of the New Testament were written, Christians realized they were in for a longer wait. But they still ended their prayers and worship with “Maranatha,” a pair of Aramaic words meaning, roughly, “Come, Lord!”

We've been on hold for 20 centuries now.

Maybe it's time we quit waiting for someone else to take responsibility for creating a new heaven and a new earth.

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YOUR TURN

Last week's column explored the mathematical character pi. Pat Jones got some entertainment out of a misreading. She saw the words "'The descriptions of pi bear" and the phrase, she said, "made me stop and reread it to realize 'bear' was a verb and not a noun! Maybe the pi bear met Simple Simon?"

I remember getting a similar chuckle out of the old hymn, "Gladly, the cross-eyed bear..."

Ralph Milton was watching a Nova segment on TV, where mathematics was called, "the language of God."

Ralph continued, "I would have said it was 'a language of God,' who has an infinite number of other languages, such as art, music, emotions, imagination, etc. You ask if God is 'irrational', which I think is the wrong word – 'nonrational' would have been better since the former defines something antithetical to the rational. One way of knowing truth can't negate another way, but each would enhance our appreciation or understanding of whatever it was we were talking about."

Tom Watson wrote, "I looked up transcendental numbers. After reading the material for a while, I got really tired and gave up. So then I looked up pastafarianism. Irreverent or not, the latter is loads more fun than the former!"

David Gilchrist picked up on the letters about prayer, and sent along this tale:

"In a small mid-western conservative town, a new bar/tavern started a building to open up their business. The local Baptist church started a campaign to block the bar from opening with petitions and prayers. Work progressed, however right up till the week before opening, when a lightning strike hit the bar and it burned to the ground.

"The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that, till the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building, either through direct or indirect actions or means. The church vehemently denied all responsibility or any connection to the buildings demise in its reply to the court.

"As the case wound its way in court, the judge looked over the paperwork and commented, 'I don't know how I'm going to decide this, but it appears that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that doesn't.'"

PSALM PARAPHRASES

I originally wrote this paraphrase of Psalm 48 in the 1990s, before most of us had even heard of global warming and climate change. I'm not sure I would be as sanguine today about God being in charge.

1 When good things happen, when things go right,
give God the praise;

give God the glory.

2 Raise your eyes; look upward to the Lord.

The glory of the Lord looms over us, like a mountain,
like a mountain of ice towering above the tundra.

3 In the shadows of God's ramparts, no one would dare defy us.

4 No, not even the kings and rulers of this world.

They gather in force, confident of their powers;

5 They disintegrate in wonder, as they recognize their pathetic powers.

6 They were as helpless as a newborn child.

They cried out, and collapsed,

unable to support their own pride on their feeble limbs.

7 Like leaves before an autumn wind, they scattered.

8 We do not lie;

we witness in truth to what we have seen and what we have heard.

The realm of God is secure;

it is safe from human depredation.

9 It is more than human minds can grasp;

we struggle to understand.

10 The wonders of God always extend beyond us;

they defy our attempts to confine them to our comprehension.

We do not even know the name of God.

11 We only know how to worship the Lord of creation,

the one who created us, and all creatures, and all communities of creatures.

Let them all praise God.

12 So spend your life learning about this Lord;

study the scriptures and the stories of salvation,

13 So that you may pass on to your successors the truth

14 That this is God.

There is but one God, now and forever.

This God will lead us forward into the future.

For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the Revised Common Lectionary, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publishing, info@woodlake.com.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, www.seemslikegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

- Tom Watson writes a weekly blog called "The View from Grandpa Tom's Balcony" – ruminations on various subjects, and feedback from Tom's readers. Write him at twatson@sentex.net

TECHNICAL STUFF

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
