

Our son Marty's birthday was Friday, same birth date as Dr. Barry's. Marty's an attorney so it's fun to find a card that teases that side of him. This year's card had a snake playing a guitar. Another snake asks, "how are you holding the guitar" (snakes, you know, being armless). The card opens. *Don't think too hard. It's your birthday. Celebrate.*

During the Rite of Holy Baptism questions of intent are asked, like, "Will you place in their hands the holy scriptures?" The idea is more than to get them to think hard about scripture. Scripture is less about facts and more about relationship with the reign of God.

To describe holy scripture in a nutshell, it's a communal discovery that God reigns over life with a mystery called love. The Bible isn't a book as much as an encounter with love looming large and winning even us.

We hear the word "woke" these days. Being awake describes Jesus. He was "woke" to God's ever-present love. He knew he was God's child and that identity shaped everything.

In Baptism that claim is marked also on us. *Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, marked with the cross of Christ forever.*

Growing in faith is learning more and more to let this identity shape us, freeing us to be who by grace we are.

Jesus' passion was to help others wake up to this mystery – that nothing goes deeper than God's reach; nothing is outside God's permeating love; or as Episcopal priest Robert Capon says, "no noxious weeds in the fields of life lift a finger to God's reign."

Father Capon had forgotten that for a while. He hadn't broken the law, but he had done harm to others and to himself. The consequences of this harm laid him bare, until he let something besides the bad define him.

He remembered the theology of grace he taught was meant also for him. He was more than his failures. He was a child of God.

He could beat himself up every morning or he could look in the mirror and see a child of God. It must have been hard for Capon to stand in front of hundreds at a Pastoral Leadership Conference and talk about himself. But he wanted us to hear his experience of coming home to his baptism.

Despite everything he knew about himself; he was first and foremost a child of God. Grace and love defined him, not his history or his conduct.

We too face into choices every day. The news is filled with stories of weeds sown and harm being done. Sometimes we'd rather avoid the news. Too much bad. Weeds everywhere! The reign of God seems defeated before it starts. Optimism feels naïve.

But the realm of God is more than optimism. Jesus came announcing that a mystery is afoot that no weeds, no wars, no worries can hold a finger to.

The mystery isn't that God Almighty is coming to strongarm the world into a better place. The mystery is that love comes new every morning.

One of my favorite things to do as a grandma is to bath babies. Fresh water is drawn. Old water drains out – the same process over and over. So too with the mystery of God's reign. This watery process keeps happening. Mercies come new like fresh water for all who will receive.

To focus our eyes on the murky waters beneath our feet is to miss what's lavishing on us from the faucet of grace. New waters pour endlessly – for all who will receive. The challenge is entrusting ourselves to such grace. It can be hard at first. It's humbling to stand open to the goodness of God.

The world is filled with hearts too hard or out of sync with such grace. We can shame, despise, or fear the world's compact soil, or we can remember we can't see all that's gone all, what pain has been endured.

Father Capon discovered by way of his pain that he had a choice. When he looked in the mirror he could see fault, or he could see a child of God.

Jesus taught with parables – stories of truths too deep to take in head-on. Jesus rarely taught without parables. On occasion when he did, his disciples didn't understand him any better. The reign of God is too good to wrap our heads around. So Jesus told stories to tease our hearts open.

Jesus' parables are wake up calls. It's like we're wearing shades over our eyes and Jesus comes saying take the shades off – see the fields of your lives are in God's hands despite the weeds sown from within and without. God's grace is greater than all the weeds, all the wounds, all the worries.

In today's Parable of the Weeds servants tell the landowner, "Someone has sown weeds in your good soil. Do you want us to pull them out? The landowner replies, "**Let** them grow together until the harvest."

That word **let** is fascinating in its original Greek and Latin. It's a kind of "let be," or better, forget about it – like don't overthink how a snake holds a guitar – or how we're to solve the wrongs of the world.

Jesus isn't a good farmer or gardener. Some weeds need weeding out if we want plants to grow. Jesus **is** however a good theologian. He says, don't fixate on the weeds in the fields of your lives – whether sown by you or by others. Weeds **are** weeds. But you are a child of God. That is your identity – sealed by none other than the Holy Spirit.

As Father Capon learned, may we too trust that no weeds hold a finger to the reign of God. *God's kingdom is ours forever*, wrote Luther. Weeds grow, to be sure, but grace abounds all the more from God's Almighty hand. Trust grace. It's what lasts.

Amen