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*From the pastor's pen...*

There's a war going on in my yard right now. Actually it's in my garden and Ed is the primary defender against the encroaching enemy. It didn't look dangerous initially, it's actually kind of a pretty plant with delicate leaves and cute little white flowers on long green stems. I looked up what it was on the computer this morning and it's called Sticky Weed, otherwise known as Velcro Weed, Sticky Willy, or Bedstraw. The botanical name is Galium aparine.

When it first appeared last year in the lavender/wildflower garden I kind of ignored it, I'm a live and let live kind of gardener. And although, I hadn't planted it, I thought it was cute. But as the weeks went by it vined its way throughout the whole garden, wrapping itself around plants and trellises, and anything else in its way. When you try to pull it out, the stem has a sticky, picky feel and the plant sticks to your gloves, pants, anything it touches. This year it's back, but my lavender is gone, choked out by this voracious weed; and only the hardest wildflowers have made a comeback. Ed was out in the garden this weekend pulling it out, tracing it back to its roots, and trying to find every last bit to get rid of. Then he went down to the lower garden, on the other side of the house, and this aggressive weed has begun to spread in that garden as well.



I love nature, in part because I believe it gives us glimpses into spiritual truths... and this weed reminds me of sin or addictions. Most of us would never think of inviting full-blown sin or addictions into our lives, but sin or addictions seldom present themselves that way to us. When we first encounter sin or addictions it seems insignificant, and a bit attractive to us. What's the big deal? Why could just trying this out matter? But then, in a relatively short amount of time we find that it has entwined itself throughout our lives, choking out the good healthy parts of us, and taking over more and more of our thoughts and actions. We may work really hard to get rid of that sin or addiction, but as we step back to enjoy the freedom in one area of our lives, we find that it has popped up in a completely unrelated area of our lives. Jesus says, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." (John 8:34) That's a sobering thought isn't it? A slave has no power or freedom.

Ed is like Jesus in this parable. The plants in my garden are absolutely unable to defend themselves against the choking, overwhelming presence of the sticky weed, but Ed went in, pulling it out by its roots, and he'll continue to watch over those gardens making sure the sticky weed doesn't pop up again from buried roots that are still underground. There will be on-going tending that happens.

In John 8: 36, Jesus says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." It's simplistic to expect all we have to do is ask Jesus to set us free and we will be instantly free from the power and the consequences of the sin or addictions in our lives. (Sometimes it may happen that way, but not usually.) But Jesus is promising that with his help, we will be free as we allow his Spirit to work health in us, as we surround ourselves with those who are healthy, as we listen to his Word speak truth to us, and as we continue to seek the freedom Jesus has promised us.

There may be flare ups of sticky weed in our gardens again this summer, but the battle has been won, it will never be allowed to choke life out of the healthy plants in the garden. May Jesus be with you, helping you name those places in your life where sin still has power, and as you seek his help, may you come to experience the freedom he promises to all his brothers and sisters.

As you wander outside this summer, what other parables is Jesus teaching you through nature?