

## **“Wheat and Weeds Together”**

**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

**August 7, 2022**

**Pastor Andy Kinsey**

*“Let the wheat and the weeds grow together...”*

**Matthew 13:30a**

### **Prayer of Preparation**

O Lord, give us the patience to deal with the weeds in our lives that as we trust you, we will see the coming of your Son at the final harvest. Amen.

### **Sermon**

Gardening in the United States, if not around the world, is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. So many people are into gardening.

Driving around town, we can see the gardens: there are the flower gardens and the vegetable gardens. All shapes. All sizes.

We can also take a drive in the country and see the gardens and the fields there, with beans and corn and wheat. Some of the fields look quite promising. Others less so. The rain has certainly helped, but with all the rain has come more growth – and with more growth, more weeds.

I am not a gardener, but I did marry one. We are fortunate to have a wonderful place to grow flowers and other plants.

But as we all know, or at least, as many gardeners know, with gardens come weeds, and with weeds come the different ways of getting rid of them like Roundup. We can spend a lot of money on those things that can eliminate weeds. Indeed, I feel I can honestly say that we found different ways of pulling weeds during our workday here at the church!

### **Two Theological Questions**

Today, I want to share, of course, about Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the weeds. It is one of those parables that speaks on multiple levels to a series of issues: e.g., to the issue of good and evil, to the virtues of patience and humility, to the matter of the final judgement and redemption.

Jesus tells this parable right after he tells the parable of the Sower, which means there is a definite agricultural bent to it. However, if you read the parable of the Sower about how the Sower scatters seed in a free and haphazard way on the ground, and if you then read this parable about not pulling the weeds out of the wheat, you might get the impression that Jesus knows very little to nothing about farming!

Yet, when we read this parable, we must understand that the weeds or tares Jesus is talking about are what agricultural historians call “darnel,” which looks just like wheat, especially in its early growth; the problem is that the darnel kills the wheat by overwhelming the roots of the wheat.

That is important to keep in mind: It is important because, as Jesus shares, when we go to tear out the weeds or tares, we are also capable of tearing out the wheat. It, therefore, presents us with a problem, if not two fundamental questions – one is theological, the other ethical.

The theological question is, where did evil come from? Here, we learn from Jesus that “An enemy did this,” that is, an enemy sowed weeds among the wheat; the evil in this world does not come from God and Jesus wants to be clear about that. In fact, the Bible in general is not much interested in the origins of evil. Rather, it is concerned with the redemption of evil. That’s the first question.

The second question, or ethical question, is more developed: the ethical question is, should we pull out the weeds? As we just shared, this is where it gets tricky, and where we might wander about Jesus’ gardening knowledge when he says, “No, don’t pull them out.”

Now Jesus makes this comment for two reasons: 1) there is no way to pull out the weeds without pulling out the wheat too; and 2), there is going to be a harvest, and when the harvest comes, God will sort it all out, the wheat from the weeds, the good from the bad.

Therefore, in this parable, Jesus counsels his disciples to let the wheat and the weeds grow together on the one hand and to wait for God to judge at the harvest on the other. In other words, have patience with the weeds and leave the judgement to God.

## **A Difficult Parable**

It is a difficult point, especially in a world that wants to eliminate weeds at the drop of a hat, that wants to rush to judgement, or to prejudge, or, to put it another way, that wants to say who is “in” and who is “out” of God’s saving purposes.

In this parable, Jesus says that in God’s Garden, in God’s field, good wheat and bad weeds flourish together; it is messy, for sure, but that’s the way God works to redeem the world through the love of the cross, not through slash and burn destruction. Jesus takes into his body the darnel of this world and suffers in his own body the judgment of bad weeds, so that world might be free of them and live in freedom. In short, God works to judge all of us “sinners” together, which is how God saves us.<sup>1</sup>

It is why it is not our place to confine God’s judgment to the people we consider “weeds” or to the people we might consider “wheat.” Jesus didn’t. Indeed, in Jesus’ Garden, the unrighteous prostitutes and unclean lepers grow with the righteous religious folks.

This is the point Jesus is making when the farmer says, “Don’t gather up the weeds now. Wait until the harvest and they will be gathered up in other ways.”

It is so counterintuitive: how tempting it is, for example, for us to think that we can rush in and save the day by rooting out evil once and for all, only to make matters worse by bulldozing what is good! Such an action, Jesus notes, shows a lack of faith in God, for that’s exactly what God will do in the end.<sup>2</sup>

It is also a way to do great harm to others, for once we begin to judge the person next to us as unfit for God, or as a “weed” for elimination, saying that this person is somehow outside of God’s power – we are placing ourselves as judge and jury, and that’s not our responsibility.

In this story, Jesus reminds us that God will judge this world, and that we should wait for God to do so, for only God can judge without doing as much harm as good.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Wells, “Revolutionary Patience,” Duke University Chapel Sermon on July 20, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## **Reflection**

I suppose another way to put all of this is to say that God's Garden would be a wonderful place if it weren't for other people! I mean if you were like me educated and all, we would have a perfect church, with no weeds, right? Or: if I were like you, then we would have a pure community – weedless. Correct?

Oh, those darn weeds! What do we say sometimes, the grass is greener somewhere else only when you are not taking care of your own garden? It's just another way of saying that there are weeds everywhere. There is no such thing as a doctrinally pure congregation, or a morally innocent church; that's what we call fantasy. We are always a work in progress.

It is one of the reasons why I think that we Christians over the centuries have done a poor job understanding this parable: our lack of patience with others whom we consider weeds prompts us to begin new churches, new groups, new denominations. Only to falter when the weeds begin to grow among them too – and they will grow! Remember that wherever two or three are gathered, Jesus will be among them and so will those weeds.

Indeed, I don't know if this is a reason why close to 40% of clergy are wanting to leave ministry today, dealing with weeds in their churches, but I do know it is not because they don't love Jesus. Such a statistic includes clergy of course: we all are part of the problem; but how good the church would be without other people!

I know I will never forget the moment when I was in the Vincennes District; I was on what we call the District Committee on Ministry, a committee that interviews people who are coming into the ministry. One of the candidates we interviewed was in seminary, and I asked the question, "So why are you headed toward ministry in the church?"

To which he responded, "Because I enjoy working with people."

To which I asked, "Have you actually met any of the people with whom you will be working?!" (BTW: I also enjoy working with people, but it is not why I headed into the ministry!)

Indeed, I can remember the night Bishop Leroy Hodapp ordained me and others; he laid his hands on our heads, and he intoned words from our Book of Worship at the time. He said, "Never forget that the ones whom you serve are the

beloved sheep of Christ's fold for whom he died." And I thought to myself: that pretty much covers everyone – the people I like and the people I don't like. The good, the bad, the ugly. Committed. Uncommitted. Conservative. Liberal. Obnoxious. Spiteful. Loving. Kind.

And it is why I can't help but believe that God takes great pleasure – if not humor and delight – in surprising us: that the person next to us or near us today, whom we might think as a “weed” is really a cherished child of God whom God can use for our salvation. All because in God's Garden, wheat and weeds grow together.

Therefore, as I tried to share with the young seminarian in Vincennes, “Bless you for going into a vocation where you try to live with, work with, worship with, and, by God's grace, love the people God calls you to love in Jesus' name.”

And that's not only for pastors, but for all who are followers of Jesus, who have been baptized into Christ.

To be sure, it is not easy to have such patience and humility, to allow God to judge, but it is at the core of Christian discipleship.

It is also what the table of the Lord is all about: for, as Jesus shares in another parable, where a master invites the social leaders of the community to a great banquet, only to realize that they have rejected him – the master goes out into the streets in a fit of anger and invites everybody to come: the maimed, the lame, the blind, the brokenhearted, Rotarians and reprobates – society's castoffs: the ones whom the very Son of God loved and for whom he died and to whom he rose again (cf. Luke 14:15-24).

Everybody was at the table. All here. Wheat and weeds together.

Amen.