

A Sermon for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost, July 19, 2020
The Rev. Robin Teasley

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Even if we are not gardeners, most of us know something about weeds. Weeds invade the grass in our yards, they persistently pop up in our gardens, they’re everywhere! And because we have determined that weeds are bad, an entire industry has grown up around weed control. We arm ourselves with Roundup, we apply pre-emergent *and* post-emergent herbicides – none of which is good for the environment, by the way. But no matter how hard we work at it, it’s inevitable that yet another weed will appear, defying all our attempts at perfection. While Jesus had no access to a bottle of Roundup, he knew a great deal about weeds.

Last week, when we heard the Parable of the Sower, I mentioned that parables speak more to our hearts than to our heads. They teach us something different each time we hear them. Parables almost always challenge the way we’ve always thought about things. For example, in our parable today, often called the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, the servants were told *not* to pull the weeds from the field of wheat, but to leave them to God. This was not what the servants expected!

Even today, we know it seems counterintuitive, even downright illogical to just leave the weeds. Weeds will take over if you let them. Wheat and weeds would seem to be at odds with one another. And so, of course the disciples asked Jesus for an explanation because this parable made no more sense to them than the one he told before about the Sower who flung his valuable supply of seeds all over the place.

Reading this parable on the surface, along with the explanation that Jesus gave to the disciples, it *appears* to be pretty black and white. This parable is found only in Matthew, and many scholars think the second part, the explanation of the parable, was added later. This community was most likely made up of Jews and Gentiles trying to follow Jesus and live the Christian life. Perhaps the Jews believed themselves to be the wheat and the Gentiles to be the weeds, or vice versa. But as with most conflicts in community, it's likely that both groups thought *they* were right and the other was wrong. Perhaps this resonates for us today.

Throughout the gospel of Matthew there is a strong theme of judgment...who *is* the judge, who *will* be judged, what will *happen* to the judged. Living in a time when Jesus was expected to return any minute, the early Christians were preoccupied with this theme of judgment. Another characteristic of ancient thought was the assumption that the world was dualistic. Everything was black or white, good or evil, right or wrong, and you were either a disciple of Christ or a disciple of the evil one. The post Freudian world we live in does not see everything divided so neatly.¹ Some areas are gray or ambiguous.

This is true for us as well. Each of us, as individuals are both saint and sinner, wheat and weed...we are all capable of having mixed motives. Sometimes though, we get so busy trying to yank the weeds out of someone else's field that we don't even see the weeds in our own crop of thoughts and ideas. Like when Jesus said, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" back in chapter 7. The disciples are still not catching on. (Matthew 7:3) And we aren't any better at it, if we're honest.

So, what might Jesus want to say to us in *this* time and place, through this parable? I cannot answer that for you, only for myself. We must each look into our own fields, and into our own inner landscapes to see what God wants to show us in this parable. Perhaps we might do some spiritual gardening this summer; take some time to be still, to stop the frantic weeding of the world and survey our own field. In God's presence, we can sow a few seeds of inquiry and see what begins to germinate in our hearts.

We can ask ourselves - What are the weeds in our lives? What is threatening the good wheat we want to have in our field? Are we stressed over financial woes, politics, or fear of the pandemic? At first glance that all looks like weeds, but perhaps there is some wisdom to be harvested from our struggles in living with these weeds. Are we always so sure we know the difference between wheat and weeds? Might the weeds be teaching us valuable lessons we cannot learn any other way, making us stronger and more compassionate?

Finally, what is it that the weeds of the world might be keeping us from seeing? Are we so busy trying to eradicate the weeds in our neighbor's garden that we cannot see the weeds in our own back yard? Can we honestly admit there have been times when we have sown some unkind seeds or perhaps weeded too severely in another's garden?

¹ Gary Pelusa-Verdend, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 3, p 264,

Gardening, like spiritual life, takes time. It requires that we tend to the crops, wait for the harvest, and be patient to see what will be produced. So while we wait, we can take that time to learn more about ourselves, about our personal crop of wheat and weeds. And we can look to see that what we at first thought were weeds might just be wheat after all.

Rather than holding fixed images of what the Kingdom of God should be, what if we are instead patient and expectant to see what it might be. What if we live like wheat in the hope of what the Kingdom could become, waiting for the promise of new growth, new life, resurrection! Could it be.... that turning weeds into wheat is exactly the reason Christ came into the world? Amen.