

Matthew 13: 24-30

²⁴ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ 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?’ ²⁸ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ 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.’”

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“Lessons in Green: Wheat and Weeds”

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, American farmers use over 200 million pounds of herbicides per year to eradicate weeds. On average, a farmer will spend more than \$1,000 per acre to keep the weeds at out. Weeds have been the bane of farm fields, gardens and flower beds since the beginning of time. We don’t like weeds. We curse them whenever they sprout in the soil. So what do we do with a parable that says, the kingdom of heaven is compared to a farmer who sows wheat in a good field, but then an enemy comes while everyone’s asleep and sows weeds? “The kingdom is like,” says Jesus, “a field where good and evil are growing together.” Well, what are we supposed to do with that?

For starters, we admit the parable is difficult to understand. Come on Jesus, you must be exaggerating! Can’t we yank the weeds out? Let us uproot those pesky weeds out of the world and out of our own lives. After all, doesn’t our justice work aim to get at the root of the structural evils which keep popping up in our world? You know, spray some Weed B. Gone on white supremacy please. Get out the gardening hoes and dig out the oppressive legislation. Once saw a new weeding device called the “Weed Shotgun.” Maybe use that to blow holes in corporate greed. But the weeds aren’t only out there in our structures, are they? We look inside ourselves and there are some animus weeds we’d like to get rid of in our own lives. Maybe we are too critical. Maybe we jump too quickly to judging others. As our friends in A.A. say, we would like God to remove the defects of our character. Doesn’t Jesus know, letting the weeds grow freely can destroy the good crop!? The kingdom is like a field full of wheat and weeds. Well, that’s a problem. We’d like to yank the weeds out! Not only in the world, but in our own lives as well.

Except when we listen to the landowner he says, “Leave the weeds alone. Let the pesky weeds grow alongside the wheat.” Now what are we supposed to do with that? So perhaps we can brainstorm the question together: ***why might Jesus tell us to leave the weeds alone? Why not pull out the weeds?*** [Congregation answers question] Perhaps we say it is too hard to tell the difference sometimes. Did you know? There is a devil of a weed called bearded darnel that looks identical to wheat. Except bearded darnel will poison you. One makes bread and beer, but other will make you hallucinate. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference.

Or we dig around and find the complexity of our human ambiguity. In the field of our humanity, good and evil are enmeshed. Pull out the bad and in the process, we might pull out the good as well. Of course, what we consider wheat or weedy depends on who you ask, doesn't it? Years ago, there was a young man who loved beauty and art. Home and Gardens did a feature article on him talking about his well-kept garden, the fresh flowers on the dinner table. How every morning he checks-in with the gardeners and how, “These men...are not so much servants as they are loyal friends.” It goes on about his healthy habits: he a vegetarian, doesn't drink alcohol or touch a cigar. The article paints a picture of a weed free life, but a few months after the article was released he declared war on Poland. The young man's name, of course, was Adolph Hitler. Our complexity swings the other way as well. George Washington may be an American hero figure, but he owned slaves and concubines. Some of our hero athletes end up shot up on steroids; pastors have been spiritual con-artists who launder cash. The list goes on. We do not live in a comic book world of superheroes and supervillains—where absolute good battles absolute evil. Our humanity is painfully ambiguous. So let the weeds and the wheat grow together, says Jesus, or else we might pull out the good with the bad.

But let's not forget how the parable ends. It ends with a harvest. Where God sits as the judge who separates the good grain from the tares. Of course, it doesn't mean we sit back in the meantime and let weeds consume the field until God shows up. We are not called to apathy, but to resist and speak out against the forces which threaten to destroy our humanity and our world. But the end of the parable says, we aren't the judge. We don't see clearly enough to separate the good from the bad. And when we try we can so easily get stuck in the briar patch of our own self-righteousness. You know there are cookbooks on the market called “Edible Weeds.” In it are recipes for dandelion stew and chickweed salad. You can even find medicinal purposes for the bearded darnel to cure headaches and insomnia. Perhaps it is like God to even uses the weeds to serve God's end purposes.

Because, what the world said was a prostitute, God says “No, that's my prophet!”
What the early church saw as Saul “the persecutor” God says, “Hold on! That's St. Paul my preacher!”

What society sees as a sinner, God says, “No, no, no, that's my storyteller of grace.”

Once happened upon a field filled with an assortment of lovely wildflowers. Growing alongside the wild daisies and marigolds were patches of crabgrass and clovers. Now I'm no botanist, but I believe I saw some poison ivy in the mix as well. Standing in the middle of the field was a large telephone pole with its electrical wires outstretched like arms on each side. Climbing up the timber was an invasive southern weed from Japan called Kudzu. The Kudzu had wrapped itself tightly up the pole, its vines extending down the arms of the power lines. You know, I had to look at it a couple times, because it no longer looked like a simple pole with lines. You know what it now looked like? It looked like a cross.

The kingdom of heaven is like a field where *all things* grow under the extravagant wonders of grace. Now church, what are we supposed to do with that?