

Of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24-30-36-43

Last week Pastor Clay shared the story of what appeared to be a rather inept or uncaring farmer who spread seeds willy-nilly on unprepared ground. Some seeds flourished, others withered and died out quickly. You learned that the Sower is God and the seed is the Word. Jesus tells these stories, parables, to get us thinking.

Today's parable is no different. We have a landowner who is willing to let weeds grow up amid his lovely wheat crop, much to the confusion of his hired help who are ready to yank out the bad to save the good. Now, I've never grown wheat, but I do know that weeds in your crops can steal nutrients, choke root systems, and otherwise damage the crop and reduce its yield. Why would this landowner just let the weeds go?

One explanation is that the weeds in question, known as bearded darnel, (even the name of this weed sounds sinister) are plants that look like wheat as it grows. The two cannot be distinguished one from the other until the heads form. Wheat will produce well-formed heads of grain that are good for food, while the bearded darnel does not produce any good fruit. If the field hands were to start pulling what they thought were weeds, they very well could be yanking up the good wheat thus reducing the yield of that field. Being aware that he could lose half his

crop to well-meaning culling, the landowner chooses to take his chances and let the weeds grow alongside the good wheat.

This story is the logical next step in the parable of the seeds. Jesus has established that the seed that fell on good soil would produce a yield 100, 60, or 30 times what was sown. This is the good wheat planted by the landowner. The good wheat are those who have heard the Word and believed. These are the new disciples of Christ, gathered as the new church. So why would the landowner now allow this crop of new believers to be challenged by weeds in its midst?

Matthew addresses the reality that the church is a “mixed bag”, so to speak. The church is not entirely pure in that we have weeds that grow up among the wheat. You may know some weedy people, those churchgoers who act contrary to the mantra of “what would Jesus do?” These folks covertly, and even overtly, act in un-Christian ways. Their actions mark them as weeds but, truth be told, that could be said of any one of us at any given time. How fortunate we are that our landowner, has decided to wait until the final harvest to decide which of us are weeds destined for the fire and which are wheat to be brought into the heavenly storehouse.

I think this is where we as Christians might struggle, especially in this day and age. Although Jesus has told us that God is the final judge, not us, we still want to decide who is wheat and who is weeds, who is a

child of God and who is a child of Satan. But when dealing with real people, who in themselves can be a mixed bag, that black and white stance falls short.

Let's look at some of our Bible "heroes" who may have been more weed than wheat. We start with Jacob who cheated his brother out of their father's blessing and then cheated his uncle/father-in-law out of livestock when he left under cover of darkness with his wives and children. That same Jacob would become known as Israel, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. God chose this weed to be the wheat that fulfilled the covenant given to his grandfather Abraham.

Another weed, perhaps much better known as King David, can be considered here. David, although he started out as the sweet shepherd boy, as an adult he became an adulterer and murderer. Yet, despite that, he is known today as a man after God's own heart for his willingness to confess and repent of his sins. Though given to some weed like behaviors, David finished like wheat.

And it's not just the men who were weed like. Rahab, a woman of questionable moral standing, saved the Israelite spies and turns up in the genealogy of Jesus. Definitely finished as wheat there. Mary Magdalene, a demon possessed woman, goes on to become the very first apostle of Jesus when she was given instructions to go and tell the others that Jesus was alive. Demon possessed – weed, Jesus' apostle – wheat. I

doubt that any of their contemporaries would have expected these people to end up in the heavenly storehouse, but rather could see them being bundled for destruction in the unquenchable fire.

In a more contemporary note, I recall one of my high school classmates. He dressed in the hippie style of the day, fringed vest, bell bottom jeans, and was known as one of the biggest stoners in our class. Classmates, teachers, and likely a few parents thought this young man was weed through and through. Today he serves as a missionary overseas. Weed (no pun intended) turned to wheat.

This points out the fact that we, even though we are children of the heavenly King, do not have the discernment to decide who is wheat or weed in our midst. We are aware that children of the evil one do exist and we are to be aware of their existence. Although we must acknowledge that they can be disruptive, we must accept that it will not be until the final days that the *angels of God* will sort the weeds and the wheat. Did you catch that, the *angels of God* will do the culling, not us.

Gary Peluso-Verdend in his commentary of this passage of Scripture shares these thoughts:

Minimally, the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds serves as a caution against any ecclesiology that is tempted to collapse ecclesiology and eschatology, to identify the church on earth with the empire of the heavens. The church is not the fulfillment of God's promised reign. Consequently, it would seem the visible church as a mixed body could reflect profitably on all the following doctrines,

metaphors, and depictions—each of which expresses one or more facets of the church’s mixed nature:

—A hospital for the sick

—Noah’s ark (one can stand the stench on the inside only because of the storm on the outside)

—The community of saints, militant and triumphant

—The being-saved community

—A *corpus permixtum*, (the mixed body referred to by Augustine of Hippo)

—Sign and instrument, sacrament and foretaste of the empire of the heavens

—In need of discipline and compassion

—One, holy, catholic, and apostolic

—Reformed and reforming

—Conveyer of the means of grace, both to its members and to the world

For a church that has experienced discord and division, the question is raised, “Does this mean we do not address a brother or sister who is behaving in un-Christian ways?” No, it does not. However, it also means that it is not up to us decided whether or not that person will come to inherit the Kingdom of God. Remember that God does not wish that any should perish, so he gives us time to decide whether we want to be rich, golden wheat, or bearded darnel.

As people who are a mixture of wheat and weed, of holy and unholy, of potential fruitfulness and potential destructiveness, we are called to turn from looking to God to make a final judgement to working as a

community and individuals to that which increases the potential of holiness, not only in ourselves, but in those around us. Pray that we all are the wheat that is gathered into those heavenly storehouses at the time of the harvest. AMEN

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