

Weeds and Wheat
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
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(Disciples: Nat Myers, Kat Wenz; Jesus: James Robles)
September 18, 2022
Scripture from the Inclusive Bible Matthew 13: 24–30; 36–45

There is a crowd of people following Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is preaching and is talking in lots of parables. Two disciples separate from the crowd to talk about what Jesus is saying. The day is warm, and the friends are tired. Jesus has been talking for a while!

Disciple 1: I'm getting hot! A strong breeze would feel good around now. I'm tired, too, and my feet hurt, we walked a long time this morning!

Disciple 2: Quit complaining! Jesus seems to be on a roll, he's going to tell another story, hey wait, it's a parable.

Disciple 1: What's that? Aren't stories, well, just stories?

Disciple 2: Not really. Weren't you paying attention in synagogue? A parable is kind of a story that makes you wonder. It compares something to another thing and isn't meant to be super obvious. We are left to figure it out. But don't worry, we're close to Jesus, and he said we'd know what he was talking about. Shhhh!

Jesus: The kingdom of heaven is like a farmer who sowed good seed in a field. While everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then made off. When the crop began to mature and yield grain, the weeds became evident as well.

The farmer's workers came and asked, "Did you not sow good seed in your field? Where are the weeds coming from?"

The farmer replied, "I see an enemy's hand in this."

The workers asked him, "Do you want us to go out and pull them up?"

"No," replied the farmer, "if you pull up the weeds, you might take the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until the harvest, then at harvest time I will order the harvesters first to collect the weeds and bundle them up to burn, then to gather the wheat into my barn."

Disciple 1: Well, that was clear, not! What in the world? Jesus seems to be all about seeds and weeds and dirt today. I'm glad he explained the story, I mean parable, about the different types of soils, but really. My brain needs a break!

Disciple 2: I don't know. My imagination starts to work when I hear Jesus' parables. Let's think about it for a bit. You know, the "weeds" that Jesus is talking about look an awful lot like wheat when they first begin to grow. I know! There's a weed called a darnel that you see all over the place here. When wheat and darnel mature, both have "ears" that appear. The ears of the real wheat are heavy and droop, but the ears of the weed stand up straight. If the workers were to pull them up before they reach maturity, they may pull out strong, healthy wheat and mess up the yield for the farmer.

Disciple 1: Okay. But I know that my cousin Eli spends a lot of time pulling weeds in order to make his crops grow better, so it really doesn't make sense to me. And who would have the patience to "wait and see" when it comes to making a living for your family? People need all the wheat they can grow. Here's Jesus, once again, looking like a BAD farmer. And aren't weeds BAD? Dangerous, even?

Disciple 2: What really is a weed? On the one hand, a weed can be a plant that chokes out healthy plants. It's not wanted, and the farmer doesn't plant it. Not so terrific. But then again, you have to admire weeds. They grow even when they aren't planted and always where they aren't wanted. They are strong, right? They can keep growing even in drought.

Disciple 1: And hard to get rid of!

Disciple 2: And Jesus is always talking about how the Kingdom is like a mustard seed that grows into an enormous bush. So, he's comparing God's Kingdom of justice, mercy, compassion and love to a huge, gnarly mustard bush. And it's a weed!

Disciple 1: Oh, yeah. That story. Again, makes my brain hurt.

Hey, do you think that Jesus might be talking about the weeds as those things that are hurtful and evil? Harmful ideas and practices? Or, or, people who are bad, and who may be trying to get him, to get us? I know I'd like to yank up those folks and toss them into a heap! I'm always keeping a look out for the ones who I think want to get rid of us, they have shifty eyes.

Disciple 2: Whoa, pal! Things are rough for us, living under Roman occupation, they are unfair, but do you really think that Jesus, our teacher, a person known to never, ever hurt someone physically is asking us to punch out, like, a guard or something? I just don't see it. Jesus gets angry at injustice and suffering, but he always seems so compassionate. And, brave, too. Talking to those in power – telling the truth about us and about God. He's always forgiving people, even us, when we make mistakes. Which happens a lot. He is a lot like I imagine God to be.

Disciple 1: Hey, look, Jesus is heading into the house. Let's follow him, c'mon.

Disciple 2: Jesus, Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.

Jesus: The farmer sowing the good seed is the Chosen One. The field is the world, and the good seed, the citizens of the kin-dom.

The weeds are the followers of the Evil One, and the enemy who sowed them is the Devil.

Disciple 1: Hey, I told you he was talking about people! Look, people are just all good or all bad, don't you think? You either belong to Jesus, or the devil.

Disciple 2: No, I don't think so. Remember, Jesus is a master at hyperbole, an exaggeration to help us pay attention. And he always encourages us to think, not in terms of either or, but both. And above all, he reminds us how we are loved, but can still be misguided and do things that harm others and ourselves. That we need to listen, so... Shhhh... he's still talking.

Jesus: The harvest is at the end of the age. The Chosen One will send the angels who will weed out the kin-dom of everything that causes sin and all who act lawlessly. The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But those who are just will shine like sun in the kin-dom of the Abba God. Let those who have ears to hear, hear this!"

Disciple 2: See? Jesus says that the angels will do the weeding at the end of the age. Maybe that isn't the job of the workers or the farmer right here and now. I don't know about you, but that takes a weight off my shoulders. Instead of looking at everyone else and what they are doing, instead of judging for myself who God loves and who God doesn't, I can focus on Jesus, and check myself for the ways I may stray from his

teachings. Plus, he says that every THING that causes sin and causes us to act out will ultimately be destroyed. People aren't all good or all bad, are they?

Disciple 1: But, but, but isn't that hard? I'm feeling zealous about making this world a more just and caring place. More like the kind of world that Jesus helps us imagine. I don't know if I have the patience to let the pesky weeds grow beside the wheat, so to speak.

Disciple 2: Remember that Jesus is saying that we have to let them grow side-by-side because sometimes we don't know what is really a weed and what is wheat. If the workers tried to dig up the weeds, they might destroy the wheat by mistake. It's complicated, and we are limited because we are human. We aren't God. Jesus talks a lot about not being a stumbling block for others.

Disciple 1: I would never want to think that my actions would harm another who is simply trying to live and has fallen on some hard times. Sometimes it's hard to tell what's inside a person. Maybe it's *always* hard.

Disciple 2: Judgement has a place; it is God's job. Maybe our job is to continue to follow the Master with our whole lives. Rooted and grounded in God's love, we can stay busy sharing God's love and forgiveness, focusing on the most important thing. We can pray to have patience and check ourselves when we mess up.

Disciple 1: Yeah, I think you're right. Hey, Jesus is at it again...he's telling another parable, let's go listen.

(The End)

I am thankful for Kat, Nat, and James for helping us explore what, for me, is a very challenging parable.

The story of the weeds and wheat is brilliant, it crosses boundaries of culture and time. Where plants grow, there are weeds. Perhaps we all have a story of pulling what we thought was a weed, only to discover it was a different kind of plant. Or unintentionally moving a weed to a healthy bed of flowers or caring lovingly for something thinking it was a beautiful plant but discovering it was an invasive species. Or how about spraying Round-up on weeds, only to kill the plants close-by?

Here are three thoughts, some “think withs” about this parable:

First, throughout the 13th chapter in Matthew, and of course other places in Jesus’ ministry, he stresses listening. “Let those who have ears, listen.” Listen beneath the words... listen to the world around you. I do not think we can overemphasize the importance of listening. I have heard that we should listen twice as much as we talk, since we have 2 ears and 1 mouth! Listening opens our hearts and minds to receive God’s still, small voice. Listening allows the Spirit to move. As a community, and a culture, we are learning to listen to voices long silenced, and discovering more about the real history of our country and city and world and our role in it. Listening is a spiritual practice. Being listened to is a gift. And we give that to others and to God. Let those who have ears, listen.

Second, maybe Jesus is telling us, through this story, to back off judging each other. Clearly, we do not know what every person is going through. I would not like to be judged on my worst day by someone having the easiest day of their life. Of course, we make judgements about all kinds of things throughout our days, but when it comes to wondering who is in and who is out, that isn’t even a question for us. God’s love is poured out upon everyone, and our call is to love and serve to the best of our

ability. When we judge another, it often comes from a sense of fear. Perhaps instead of fear, we can try to be curious. Why is this happening? What's the story behind the action? Let's leave the judgement to God, so we can focus on what we're about and spend less time fretting over others.

And finally, maybe Jesus' story of the weeds growing alongside the wheat illuminates that the reality that unjust, cruel things exist in the world, right alongside the beautiful and life-giving. Ours is to keep on following Jesus, even as we pay attention to those things that are hurtful and harmful. We need to pray for the strength, discipline, energy and imagination to stay true to God's call to the work of discipleship and action on behalf of and with the vulnerable.

Jesus preached 2000 years ago, yet his parables continue to confront us, challenge us, and call us to a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. What a gift to share the journey with all of you.

Thanks be to God. AMEN