

Sermon – The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Rev. Mike Potter

1. Prayer

Will you please pray with me and for me . . . O gracious and loving God, we pray that we find your grace in these words of Scripture and that we learn and have the courage to live into the truth that these words reveal in our hearts this morning. I pray, O God, that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

2. Introduction

- a. When I came to SSI, I noticed that nearly everyone gardens.
- b. At our house, we have two gardens – one in the front and one in the back – with flowers and shrubs in vibrant colors, homegrown vegetables, and all sorts of amazing plants.
- c. This Spring, I planted Brussel Sprouts – never mind that they turned out to be cabbages . . . I fertilized and watered them regularly, treated them for caterpillars, and yes, I weeded.
- d. Like the slaves in today's parable, I pulled those weeds right away so that they wouldn't rob my precious plants of nourishment and inhibit their growth.
- e. Isn't that what a good gardener is supposed to do?
- f. The slaves thought so . . . but their Master knew better and advised them to wait patiently until the time was right.
- g. Patient waiting is not something we do easily, is it? . . .

3. **Last week**, we heard the Parable of the Sower. Rev. Juli focused on the Sower – God's generosity and inclusivity in sowing good seed everywhere, regardless of the condition of the soil.

4. **This week**, the emphasis seems to be on God's **patience and faithfulness** in the face of our inattention and our many worldly distractions and temptations.
- a. God sows only good seed. It is the “evil one” who sneaks in during the cover of darkness and sows “weeds” among the wheat.
 - i. The Greek word for “weeds” in this text is *Zinanon*, sometimes called “darnel”.
 - 1. This is a poisonous ryegrass weed that greatly resembles wheat until it is ripe.
 - 2. It's hard to tell the difference between darnel and wheat until the darnel's black grain appears.
 - b. The slaves were anxious to please their Master and wanted permission to pull all the weeds out right away, just most of us would do in our own gardens. We want to remove anything that would hinder their growth. Right? . . .
 - c. But as Psalm 145 reminds us, “*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all . . . and his compassion is over all that he has made.*”
 - d. The Master urges them to be patient and not remove the weeds until the time of harvest, when they can be clearly identified and removed safely without harming the wheat.
5. When I first read this text, the first thought that came into my mind was the image of my oldest son David when he was a young teenager.
- a. My late wife Rosemary and I have two sons, David (now age 47) and Jeff (who is now 45).
 - b. Jeff has always been compliant, eager to please, and fits well into social norms.
 - c. David, on the other hand, has always followed the beat of different drummer – and still does.
 - i. He did well in school when he received warm attention from his teachers and the subject matter interested him.

- ii. But when he entered 7th grade, the classrooms were crowded and the teachers were often overwhelmed. He did not do well . . . and had to repeat that grade. I will spare you the details . . . but it was a difficult time for him and for our family.
- iii. It became a crisis when David ran away from home when he was 13. He was gone for several days.
 - 1. We were worried sick. We finally located him and got him home. His mother and I decided that it was time for an intervention . . . “Tough Love”.
 - 2. My next-door neighbor worked for Juvenile Court and arranged to have a squad car come to our house to “arrest” David.
 - 3. One of the hardest things that I’ve had to do in my life is to put my son in the back seat of a police car and watch them drive away with him . . . It was heartbreaking . . .
 - 4. Rosemary and I visited him at Juvenile Court the next day. He was belligerent and didn’t want to talk. So, we left him there.
 - 5. The next night, after sleeping another night on a mat on the cold floor with 30 other boys, he was ready to come home.
- iv. Things settled down for a while, but significant tensions remained, especially between David and his mother.
 - 1. She finally had enough and threatened to send him away to a reform school in Middle Tennessee.
 - 2. However, I encouraged patience and counseled David – primarily by just listening to him and letting him know, as best I could, that we loved him and were going to see him through this difficult time in his life.
- v. Patience won out, just as it did in our text today.

- vi. David is now a social worker for the Tennessee Dept of Children's Services.
 - 1. He manages the placement and monitoring the foster care of youth with learning and physical disabilities throughout the State of Tennessee.
 - 2. He is magical with troubled children. They respond to him.
 - 3. I couldn't be prouder of him.
- vii. David is an example of someone who could have easily been mistaken for a "weed" . . . uprooted and discarded when he was young.
 - 1. I shudder to think what would have happened if we had sent him to reform school . . . where he would be forced to conform to so-called Norm.
 - 2. It could have pushed him over the edge and ruined his life.
 - 3. But by the grace of God, with patience and loving care, and genuine respect for his individuation and his unique gifts, there have been huge blessings for him, for our family, and for all the lives he has touched over the past 20 years.
- viii. The big lesson for me was discovering the value of "patient waiting", one of the fruits of the Spirit described by Paul in Galatians 5.
 - 1. The slaves in our text today didn't want to wait. They wanted to "fix" the problem right away.
 - 2. This is the world's way . . . but it isn't God's way.
 - 3. How often do we yield to the temptation to take quick action to make the problem go away . . . often without fully evaluating the repercussions?

4. The Master in our text encourages patient waiting. He doesn't want to lose any of the wheat due to hasty action and misidentification.
5. God is ever faithful. God never gives up on us . . . any of us . . .
6. In our text today from Genesis, we hear God tell Jacob:
"Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."
7. And the psalmist in today's reading asks: *"Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"* The answer is: Nowhere! God is always with us wherever we are.

6. God is inclusive; God sows only good seed and, as Rev. Juli reminded us last week, God sows it everywhere . . . That means that everyone is included.

We hear this clearly in Acts 10:34-36. (from The Message by Eugene Peterson):

"Peter fairly exploded with his good news: 'It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel—that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again—well, he's doing it everywhere, among everyone.'"

7. Everything is being put together again . . . everywhere . . . among everyone!

a. In verse 38, Jesus describes the “good seed” as “children of the kingdom” while the “weeds” are “children of the evil one”. How, then, can everyone be included?

i. Our egoic minds want to make an easy distinction based on the person we see before us – the personality – and whether we judge that person as good or bad. There’s no need to look further . . . or so we would like to think! . . .

ii. But maybe what is pointed to here is more subtle? What if instead of what Jesus calls “children of the kingdom” or “children of the evil one” are simply the characteristics of a person’s heart, “seeds”, if you will, that could grow into wheat or could grow into weeds.

1. Children of the Kingdom, grounded in God’s Love, exhibit the fruits of the Spirit that Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”.

2. In contrast, Children of the Evil One, are grounded in fear and the illusion of separation; they exhibit prejudice, hatred, narrow-mindedness, and exclusivity.

b. In verses 40-42, Jesus says that the weeds will be gathered up and burned up with fire.

i. Now that’s a pretty scary thought! I’m sure he got the attention of his listeners then, just as he does today . . .

ii. But what if it’s not the person – his or her essence or soul – but the source of those harmful attributes that gets burned up – the fear-based illusion of separation . . . the greed, the hatred, the prejudice?

- iii. A refiner's fire that purifies and melts away the dross, to reveal the pure gold beneath – for doesn't scripture tell us that we are all made in the image of God?
- iv. Therein lies our hope, as Paul tells us in our reading from Romans today, *"in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."*
- c. Yes, everyone belongs in God's kingdom.
 - i. As Rev. Juli has mentioned, the **Salt Spring Pride Festival: Rooted in Community** began this past Thursday and continues through today, with the Pride Parade and Street Party taking place today right here in Ganges beginning at 12:30 p.m. at the United Church Meadow.
 - ii. It is a celebration of the lives of those whose sexual orientation is different than the so-called "Norm".
 - 1. Did you know that 12% of all Canadians and 22% of those Canadians under age 35 identify as LGBTQ+? It's roughly the same in the U.S.
 - 2. This is not a small percentage, my friends! These are our friends and neighbors . . . for many, our family!
 - 3. A large and vital part of our population have been feared, demeaned, and excluded through the ages. They have suffered greatly . . . We all have suffered greatly by their exclusion.
 - 4. Often, they are the most talented, creative, and loving people you will ever meet.
 - iii. As some of you know, Elaina and I met through an online meditation group that has been meeting biweekly for the past five years. We have all become quite close.
 - 1. One of our members, Mark Dilcom, is gay.
 - 2. Mark is a delightful, talented man who lives in NYC. He has been working tirelessly for the past several

years to change the way churches have excluded and encouraged prejudice against LGBTQ+ people and to bring healing to those who have been excluded.

3. Mark was led by the Spirit of God to form a non-profit organization called **DIVINE All Along**, a human rights and support network dedicated to ending religious abuse and providing affirming community for LGBTQ+ individuals. They advocate for radical self-acceptance and spiritual autonomy, teaching that all individuals are inherently divine and worthy exactly as they are.
 4. I have learned so much from Mark about God's inclusiveness.
 5. This is what our text today tells us . . . everyone belongs in God's kingdom!
 6. Everyone is invited to God's banquet. It's up to the individual to choose whether to attend, but everyone is invited and encouraged to attend . . . and the least spark of intention toward unity and spiritual growth will be generously encouraged and supported by the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. Each of us have a role to play in encouraging those we meet to be all that God created them to be, to give them respect, to discover and share their unique gifts, and to be united in the Love of God which interpenetrates and supports all of life.
 - v. I hope that many of you here will join us in celebrating the diversity and life-giving spirit of God's all-inclusiveness as we gather at the United Church Meadow at 12:30 today and begin to march into Ganges at 1:00 in support of the **Salt Spring Pride Festival**.

- d. The time for harvest has come. Let us gather all the good grain that God has sown and nurtured . . . and celebrate God's kingdom here on earth right now.
- 8. May God's good seeds grow in your hearts and may all of the fruits of the Spirit be found abundant among you.

AMEN