

8th Sunday after Easter – Proper 11, Year A
A Sermon Preached by Fr Ian M Delinger
on July 19, 2026

Genesis 28:10-19a / Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23 / Romans 8:12-25 / Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

*Teach us Your way, O Lord, and we will walk in Your truth;
We will thank You, O Lord our God, with all our heart,
and glorify Your Name for evermore.*

I find it interesting that in Jesus' Parable, the Wheat and the Weeds – the Good and the Evil – are to coexist until the End of Time when God will judge. Jesus is advocating *against* eradicating the weeds! Maybe it's because He – like most people – know that Round-Up will kill *everything*, not just the weeds!

To me, this was Jesus making demands on our focus on God that He understands is riddled with the complications of what it means to be human and to live in community. The Wheat and the Weeds – the Good and the Evil – will always exist side-by-side in all aspects of our lives: in our society and communities, in our ministries, in our own lives and within our own souls. I want to take a brief look at the Wheat and the Weeds in those realms of our lives, and then explore how we can address that.

It's probably really easy to distinguish the Wheat from the Weeds in our larger society and communities. We all know who the good guys are, and we are quick to point out the bad guys. The bad guys do bad things that we wouldn't do, and they usually hold polar opposite values. Obviously the good guys are those who, at a minimum, keep to themselves and get on with their lives, and at best, help their neighbors. The bad guys cheat, steal, lie and kill. The good guys would never do any of that.

But is it *really* that easy? Your favorite aunt dies of lung cancer after 50yrs of smoking a pack a day. She's a good woman, but cigarettes are bad. Who, then, in society are the Weeds?

- The tobacco farmer?
- The cigarette manufacturer?
- The marketing firm that the cigarette manufacturer used to promote the products?
- The vendors of cigarettes?
- The government that won't stop the sale of cigarettes even though they know they kill people?
- The friend who gave her that first cigarette under the bleachers at school when she was 14?
- The many people in her life that didn't tell her to quit smoking, including her doctors?
- Her, for smoking in the first place?

Whether it's lifestyle-related diseases, gun crime, benefits for the poor, the Wheat and the Weeds in society will always live side-by-side and sometimes be difficult to distinguish. If we pull out the Weeds, the Wheat will come with it.

It's *safe* for us to only consider big-picture "evils" as the Weeds, like I said: those who cheat, steal, lie and kill. That keeps us a safe distance from any sort of culpability, and we remain comfortable that our morals and values are intact. But we need to be careful lest we become complacent.

What about the Wheat and the Weeds in our ministries and our vocations? Are we always executing our ministries or jobs with the best of intentions and in the most effective ways? Do we ever do the reflection necessary to understand where we might fit into a potentially dysfunctional system?

As the first company I worked for in the Silicon Valley grew, we got a dedicated, trained HR Manager. Jill often joked that she went into HR so she would always have her own office. Well, I'm still friends with the founders of that company. I joked about that once, only to be told that that was Jill's last job in HR.

It happens in churches, too. Someone will build up a fantastic ministry, put their team together and appear successful for years, even decades. But a new priest comes in to discover that s/he has always called the shots, hand-selected any new volunteers, refused any notion of succession planning and obfuscated what “success” actually looks like.

The Wheat and the Weeds are so intertwined, it’s difficult to tell the difference ... until something catastrophic brings a ministry or a job to an end, and only then can one tell the difference between the Wheat and the Weeds.

What about the Wheat and the Weeds in our own lives and in our own souls? Is it possible that each of us is made up of both Wheat and Weeds, good and bad? Jesus seems to think so, because, throughout Matthew, Jesus warns us of our own faults:

- *The Pharisees asked, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”*

From Matthew 9. As followers of Jesus, we consider ourselves among the tax collectors and sinners. We believe that Jesus came as our physician.

I think the most obvious moment that Jesus indicates that we as individuals are made up of both Wheat and Weeds is a passage we won’t hear this year. It’s Matthew 5, set for the 7th Sunday in Epiphany, which we did not have this year, and for Independence Day, which we did not have a service for. It goes like this:

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even

the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

As we go through our lives, we are prone to the pettiness that we accuse others of. Why? Because we are human. But as followers of Jesus, we are not so much called to a higher standard, but challenged to push beyond our human tendencies to love not only ourselves, but to love our neighbors *as we love ourselves – in the same manner* as loving ourselves.

But if your very own soul is the field into which both good seed and bad seed have been sown, and if your very own soul has both Wheat and Weeds, how do you weed the unwanted stuff within you? Well, it's as old as our faith itself: *Repentance*.

Repentance, or Penance is when we confess our sins and make restitution where possible, with the intention to amend our lives.

We can cry Abba! Father! Penance has had a long and varied history within the Church, riddled with its own Wheat and Weeds – indeed there have been good and there have been evil forms of repentance over the last 2,000yrs. In The Episcopal Church now, we have 2 primary forms of penance: corporate Confession in the Eucharist and in Morning and Evening Prayer, and the *Reconciliation of a Penitent [which can be found on p447 of the BCP]*.

The corporate Confession is a bit of a catch-all, acknowledging that we *do* have Weeds, no matter how good we believe ourselves to be. Someone once suggested we leave it out because it makes her feel uncomfortable, and it perhaps is a barrier to people coming into the Church. That would suggest that:

*[we come] to this Table for solace only, and not for strength;
for pardon only, and not for renewal.¹*

... as is stated in one of our Eucharistic Prayers. And in our country today with the dominant expression of our religion being White Christian Nationalism, and the displays of hypocrisy against the teachings of Jesus that go with it, I think experiencing a faith community acknowledging together that we are sinful and fall short of what Jesus calls us to is *exactly* what a newcomer to the Church might want or need. The Confession reminds us that, no matter how “good” we believe ourselves to be, we are all made up of Wheat and Weeds. It reminds us that, as Christians, we are called to humility, not set apart for domination. We are reminded that love of self and love of neighbor are hard tasks and even harder to be lived.

The *Reconciliation of a Penitent* is a private form of Confession perhaps for a particularly thorny Weed. It’s not reserved for the “evil ones”. It’s for anyone who has something weighing heavily on their heart and mind. This can range from needing forgiveness for estranged relationships to neglecting oneself. It’s a process between the priest and the person, done in private where the issues are talked through, a path toward reconciliation is made and a discussion of what absolution looks like offers hope.

In the Early Church, reconciliation was only allowed once. Since Christian communities were small, everyone would know the offense and who committed it. The bishop would physically remove the person from the community to prevent what they believed to be contamination.

Then it was felt that the community should be included – or the penitent be accountable to the community. Roman Catholic liturgist Mgr James Crichton described this process:

¹ Eucharistic Prayer C, BCP 1979

In the 4th-century form of penance, the sinner came before the assembly, presided over by the bishop, and acknowledged his sinfulness (exomologesis). He was confronted with the gospel demands and enrolled in the order of penitents. He was excluded from Communion but could attend the ministry of the word, after which he was dismissed with a blessing. Like all sinners, he was prayed for in the Prayers of the Faithful.²

Over the centuries the Reconciliation went back and forth between the expulsion of the individual and being both, held accountable to, and in the prayers of the community. I like that today, in The Episcopal Church, we have both. We let the Weeds stay among the Wheat, and we acknowledge together that we are all composed of both.

Ultimately, our Confession and the receiving of absolution is our returning to God. As we said in the Psalm:

*God has searched us out, and knows our hearts; *
God tries us and knows our restless thoughts.*

The Church believes that sin is anything that separates us from God. Being composed of both the Wheat and the Weeds means that we sometimes separate ourselves from God, maybe momentarily, or maybe for longer periods. The Weeds become more prominent. But Confession helps us do the necessary gardening ... without destroying the entire crop.

Crichton pastorally advises us that the Weeds are not always the worst of the worst, but part of everyday life. He wrote:

A world that has lost the sense of sin may need a different kind of theological and psychological understanding. Sin is not merely

² Penance in The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought

infringement of a law, but the severing of a relationship with God. A sense of sin comes from faith in the living God, not 'the God of the Philosophers' or the legalists, but the God of the Lord Jesus Christ. For Thomas Aquinas, sin is a turning away from God to what is less than God. Penance in its various forms offers ways of turning back.

Today's Gospel – despite its stern tone and severity – gives me hope – hope for my own life in Christ, and hope for all the Children of God. Jesus tells us that the Wheat and the Weeds must grow together until the End of Time. It is God who judges the Wheat from the Weeds, not us. Our job is to grow the best Wheat we can in the soil of our souls. And when we discover that there are more Weeds than we would like, we can always turn back to God.