

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon* for July 19, 2026

****This sermon belongs to the Reverend Susan Grace,
a retired Anglican priest in Australia***

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 - "Wheat and Weeds"

I come to you this morning in the name of Holy and Undivided Trinity. Amen.

This wonderful parable of the wheat and the weeds, in many ways, contains the inside out, upside-down wisdom of Jesus. As so often in the parables, the God character, the farmer, is not very sensible in conventional agricultural terms and is amazingly patient, generous and hopeful! The parable of the wheat and the weeds works on at least three levels.

Firstly, on the surface of things, despite the fact that the farmer in the parable believes that the weeds have been planted by the evil one, he instructs that the weeds not be pulled up but that they will be dealt with later, at the time of the harvest, when things will get sorted out, because he does not wish to risk harming the tender shoots of wheat. Now this makes the farmer either lazy and foolish or enacting a wisdom that is beyond rational. I think the latter. I think we need to be reminded that it is not up to us to judge what is good and not good, to pull out the weeds, to make judgements about who and what is in and who and what is out. In lots of ways, we are too quick to dismiss what we don't understand. Sometimes we tend to take some perverse pleasure in judging others, even though we have been warned not to judge others, lest we be judged. And sometimes we are full of fear for those we love for we think that they are lost to God in some way and beyond hope. This parable may be heard as a reminder to not worry so much about others. To neither judge nor to write off those who seem to be less than we think they should. This is humbling but also encouraging for those of us who see ourselves as somehow lesser.

Secondly this parable works powerfully if we consider our inner nature and the struggle between the good that we want to do and be and the less than good we often end up doing and being that St Paul has been writing about in recent weeks. If we consider that both the wheat and the weeds are part of the field of our hearts, of our inner landscape, then there is something I find very reassuring in being told to leave the weeds where they are for now. There is compassionate wisdom in cautioning against pulling up the tender shoots of wheat in our zeal to get rid of the weeds. So many of us are disheartened or ashamed of our flaws and shadowy aspects and we want to purge ourselves of what we see as our failures. But this is often violent and destructive to the self. This farmer is much more trusting of the natural process and is not panicked by the imperfections of the crop. In this

parable, I think we can hear the loving and calm reassurance of the master gardener to stay with the growth process and to trust that all will be well.

It is worth noting that winnowing, sorting, and fire were all part of the natural first century agricultural way of life. Indeed, they still are in many parts of the world. While we tend to read winnowing and fire as eternal damnation after this life is finished, (Matthew's gospel does often use fairly alarming language) I think we can also hear that what is not for our good, what is no longer needed, will be burnt away like chaff. While this process is confronting and challenging it is not the same as being dammed or punished; rather it is the process of sorting out what is for our good and what is not and separating the two and discarding, burning away, what is left over. This is ultimately loving and healing not punishing.

And thirdly I think that this parable, and all the seed parables, point to the seasonal nature of the soul's journey of growth. What we regard as weeds may be an important part of our growth process, our soul's journey. Remember that Jesus turned the understanding of what is blessing and what is curse upside down and inside out in his teaching known as the Beatitudes when suddenly those experiences we regard as suffering and even punishment – poorness of spirit, mourning, meekness or unimportance in this world, hunger and thirst, even persecution – are blessed states of being! Those things about ourselves and others that we at first identify as weeds, as failures or flaws, may just be important to our growth and development as wise and compassionate people of faith.

If you think about it, is it not our own experiences of grief and loss that enable us to be a compassionate friend to others in their grief? Is it not our own struggle with addiction and compulsion that enables us to understand and stand with others as they seek to regain control of their habits? Is it not awareness of our own failures that helps us to be patient and encouraging of others that we might otherwise dismiss? Is it not our own failure to do things in our own strength that has taught us reliance on God?

Maybe, just maybe, those things that we might call weeds or sins or wounds may actually be entry points to grace? God can use what we dismiss as brokenness or failure as a way into our hearts and minds and work a thing of beauty. It is not that weeds are 'good' for the farmer plans to sort and burn but that God's grace is not circumvented by suffering or failure. I think we are being reminded that grace and healing can abound. As Jacob discovered in his dreams in a deserted place: "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it... this is the gateway of heaven." We are being reminded yet again that God does the work of healing and blessing, inviting and growing, restoring and anointing, and that where God chooses and every where can be a gateway to heaven.