

## **Eighth Sunday after Pentecost July 23 2023**

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

This week. Another parable. More weeds. And yet one more explanation from Jesus.

So, once more, a bit of context.

This parable comes right after the explanation of the parable of the soils from last week. I mis-spoke when I said that this was nestled within the parable of the soils on Wednesday. As a side note, if you ever want a deeper exploration of the text, watch our Wednesday Worship on our YouTube channel or on our Facebook feed.

So, while it is not within the parable of the soils it is definitely meant to be read in relationship to each other.

You might ask, how did the slaves and the owner not know there were weeds in the field before it ripened? The easy answer is to say it wasn't in the script.

The other answer is that the weed described is thought to be darnell. Which looks amazingly like wheat up to the time when it produces fruit. And even then it very closely resembles wheat. So, it stands to reason that they would not be caught early.

Jesus says that this mixed field represents the world. A place where wheat and weeds exist side by side and you cannot always tell the two apart until you see what kind of fruit they bear. A place where both grow up next to each other in the same plot.

This description of the world is one that we recognize. As Christians who happen to be Lutheran, we should recognize that reality within ourselves. What Martin Luther called the Saint/Sinner that exists in each of us. That we have been fully claimed and forgiven by God through baptism and the Holy Spirit, and that we still sin.

We also know that our community of Ely, our state, our nation, the world are just like that. An interwoven mix of wheat and darnell. Good fruit and weed that can be hard if not impossible to tease apart. That exists at the same time within people, governments, agencies, businesses.

The central issue is what to do about it.

The slaves of the master think they know exactly what he would want. He just wants a clean crop, so they are ready to go out and do what to the darnell? Pull it up! Get rid of it. Make the field pure! Sure, that is what the master wants.

Right?

But what does the Son of Man say to them. Wait! If you try and pull out the darnell now that it has matured and you can tell by the fruit what it is, what will happen? You will destroy the wheat along with the weeds.

So, what does Jesus say to the slaves who think they know what he wants? Chill. Let them grow together. Apparently, there is no harm that can come to the wheat from this, at least not harm that is more dangerous than what would happen if you ripped the darnell out. The harvest will come later and the ones in charge of the harvest (who are not the slaves by the way) will take care of it.

Back to our central issue- what to do about the weeds among the wheat. The answer according to Jesus is... let it be.

If a central purpose of a parable is to give us the right question to ask or the right attitude to take as we follow Jesus along the way, then the attitude here seems to be hands off.

Perhaps that is because Jesus knows several things we can't seem to get into our heads. First, we do more damage than good when we think we know what God wants – at least when it comes to purifying the world.

How much damage, death, destruction to people has come about over the years when individuals and groups within the church have thought they knew what God wanted and acted on it. How many people who have watched that death, damage, and destruction have said, if that is who God is... I want nothing to do with it. Who have had their faith destroyed by the actions of those who believe they are doing what God wants.

Look at the declining numbers of young adults and youth under 35 who are active in the church. There is a lot going on there, but one of the things they point to is the way in which the most visible expressions of church in the US treat those they consider weeds to be uprooted. Those whose sexuality is different from the normal binary of male/female. Those who are among the LGB community. Those from other countries. Those who vote for a particular political party they feel is not compatible with the true Christian faith. Those who follow the Jewish understanding that life does not begin at conception.

This visible and vocal uprooting – with the assurance that the Master of the field is pleased- has destroyed or at least damaged, in others, the ability to hear the good news of the Gospel.

I have seen peoples lives and communities of faith destroyed because someone or a group of people decided they knew what God would want in this situation- normally something akin to keeping things pure- and it usually involved the use of force- the effects of which rippled out from the focus of that force.

If anything, this parable should always give us pause. Jesus seems to be saying, if you are good soil and ready to produce good fruit, the presence of a false wheat right next to you will do you no harm. So, leave it be.

As one author put it, as the slaves, we cannot and should not seek to resolve the tension between the reality of this world (wheat and weeds together) and what is to come (the wheat and weeds separated at the end time). Because that separation is the work of God and the heavenly beings- not us.

In the meantime, expect good and evil to be intertwined- it happens even within ourselves. Doesn't it? Saint/Sinner.

But there is another side to this tension. Are we to just let sin and evil have free reign?

No. As another author put it- it's not that Jesus doesn't care about sin and evil- we know from his ministry that he cares very much. It's just that the point is not to destroy the sinner, but to get them to stop sinning. To get them to repent. To be transformed.

The point is not to uproot the weed, but to change its very nature to become wheat. And how can that happen? Only God- the one who created it in the first place- can make that happen. But we know from last week what role we can play in that.

What are we called to do everywhere and always regardless of whether we think the person before us is the path or rocky ground. Regardless of whether we think they are a weed or wheat. Sow the Word upon them in all we say and do. And trust the Holy Spirit to do the rest. We are to love them with the same boundless love, forgiveness and compassion that God in Jesus has loved us.

The biggest problem the slaves have is that they have anointed themselves as judges over others. Deciding whether they live or die. That's idolatry. That responsibility belongs to God alone. Period.

So, does that mean we say nothing? No. Remember, Jesus spoke against sin- everywhere and always. In this way we are our neighbor's keeper. Because we love them in the same way God in Jesus has loved us we tell them- stop doing that, you're hurting others and yourself. That is not judging them- that is being a loving sibling in Christ and trying to keep them from harm and from harming others. I make no value judgments about them- You're evil. Rather I call a thing what it is- that is an evil act that hurts you and others. How do I know it's evil, because it sure ain't love like Jesus showed.

What these parables and the life of Jesus lays before us are boundaries, guiding principles for our lives individually and corporately. That regardless of what I assume by looking at someone- that they are a path (immune to God's word), or rocky ground, or weedy, or perfect soil. Regardless of my assumption I am to sow

the Word of God in all I say and do. That I should be like God in this parable and be patient – allow the mix, the complexity, the ambiguity of wheat and weeds. That I should not condemn others. And trust God and God’s wisdom in doing so.

And, that I am called to love my neighbors enough to speak when I see them doing harm to themselves or others. But to be careful in my speech and actions that I don’t seek to uproot them from the field of this world. Rather, to make sure that I sow the Word of the Gospel in them through deed and truth.

And that comes to them as it came to us. Not from being scared straight, but by being loved with grace and compassion into it. Part of the reason I come here every week is to be reminded of that. To remember