

Date: July 19, 2026 (8th Sunday after Pentecost, series A) (Proper 11)

Title: “Weeds and Wheat”

Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, “Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?”

²⁸ ““An enemy did this,” he replied.

“The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?”

²⁹ ““No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.” [...]

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.’

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ ‘As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

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I still remember what it felt like when Brenda and I learned from our real-estate agent that we were in a bidding war for our house. Both of us had an instant, automatic “pit in the stomach.” Neither of us enjoys “competition” in business matters, and in this case we didn’t even anticipate having to deal with competitive bids! It was a week before Christmas, and this house had *just* come onto the market, and we were pretty sure we were “first in line.” So, having to deal with *somebody else* who also apparently wanted this house just as much as we did, was a bit of a shock.

The way the action in today’s parable unfolds must have been a similar shock to all the characters Jesus populated that story with. Already last week, we met “**the Evil One**” who snatched-up the seed of God’s Word that fell along the path. (Matt 13:19) That was unfortunate, but still a pretty limited kind of bad news, since the only real *loss* God’s kingdom suffered because of that “**snatching**” was the loss of some potential new growth. Here though, in this story, the Evil One has upped his game considerably! No longer is he “just” messing up what God was doing, he’s actively competing against it. Right in that very same field where God had been working so hard all day to “**sow good seed**,” this enemy snuck in “**while everyone was sleeping**” to “**sow weeds among the wheat**.” (24-25)

Not only was that plan *aggressive*, it was also so *clever* that nobody even discovered it for quite a while. It was only “**when the wheat had sprouted and formed ears**” that “**the weeds also appeared**.” (26) Last week, if you remember, Jesus also talked about weeds getting in among the seed God planted. But in that case Jesus was talking about “**thorns**,” which are easy to spot, right from the get-go. *These* weeds, this week, are different—a very difficult kind of weed called “**darnel**.”

From what I’ve read, darnel poses a double danger. First, its seeds are poisonous. If you ingest enough of them, they’ll kill you—though more often they simply make you feel dizzy, off-balance, and

nauseous (kind of like you're drunk). Along with those dangerous symptoms, though, darnel itself also looks so much like wheat that one article I read calls it "**wheat's evil twin.**"¹

The two of those dangers together explain *why* this farmer's slaves do what they do, as this parable unfolds. At first, they do nothing—not even realizing that this enemy has sown these seeds there in their master's field. They blend in absolutely perfectly. Later, when those slaves do figure this out, they instantly hit the alarm button. "**Master, do you want us to go and pull 'this darn darnel' out?**" (28)

Well, that's how you and I often want to respond, too, when we see weeds of one kind or another getting a foothold in our fields. When Jesus explains this little story (in the second half of this reading), he says that "**the field is the world**"—and on that wide-open, *global* level, "oh-my-goodness," you and I see (and feel) *so much anxiety* these days, don't we, over *so many* different kinds of weeds!

- If we look out at the world from the right-hand side of that field, we're constantly upset by what we see going on, way over there on the left.
- If we look out at that same field *from* the left, we're equally perturbed by what we see, way over there on the right.
- If we stand in the middle, and look to the left on some issues, and to the right on others—well, we maybe have even more reason to be upset at all the nonsense we see going on, on both sides!

In the field of the church, the competition is a little quieter. There, it's usually more like a battle about which kind of wheat we ought to be sowing, than a fight between wheat and darnel. Yet still the struggle is real. More-conservative churches (like Lutheran Church-Canada) tend to be skeptical and alarmed at the wide-open positions some of the more-liberal denominations take on many matters. And they on their side are equally suspicious of us.

That same sort of "edgy worry" creeps its way into our personal lives too—not *only* from the world and from the church, but also from the field of our own families. It dawns on us (now and again, here and there) that *things are just not what they should be!* Weeds have somehow gotten themselves seeded into this field of what we always thought was going to be healthy and wholesome wheat. But now, we suddenly realize that our kids, or grandkids, or spouses, or siblings, are just not turning out to be the sort of people we thought they were—or (at least) not the sort of people we'd *like* them to be.

So, like these slaves in this story, we too are often tempted to "**go to God,**" in all of these situations, with three goals in mind. (27)

First, we're so upset with what we see going on, that we simply want to *tell* God about it—and get it off our chest. "Lord, look at this," we tell him; "All these weeds among our wheat! Everything seemed to be going so well, here in this beautiful field that you yourself gave us, to work in. All that 'good seed' you sowed to be a blessing, was *sprouting*, and *growing*, and *doing so well*. And now this! What a mess! We're so upset, we can hardly believe it!"

Then, besides letting God know about this sad state of affairs, you and I also (often) want to find out who to blame. "**Lord, didn't you sow good seed into your field? Where then did all these weeds come from?**" (27) That, of course, is the *Really Big Question* that haunts all of history—not just our own little 'garden plots,' but the really massive fields of nations, empires, and civilizations.

- If God is the Lord, and the world is his field, where then *did* all this evil that we see (here, there, and everywhere), come from?

¹ Sarah Laskow, "Wheat's Evil Twin Has Been Intoxicating Humans for Centuries." March 22, 2016. Online: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/wheats-evil-twin-has-been-intoxicating-humans-for-centuries>.

- *Why* did God let this all happen?—why *does* God let this all happen?—not just once, but time and time again?

These are not just theoretical questions that Jesus cooks up in the context of this made-up little story. No, they are *our* questions too, about life!—some of the deepest and most troubling questions human beings are *always* asking, in every era.

The third thing we often “go to God” with, when we *discover* nasty “**weeds among the wheat**,” is a desire to help. “**Do you want us to go and pull them up?**” (28) Nobody likes to be passive, in the face of a great disaster. We’re itching to jump in and *do something*! And often, we think we’ve got a pretty good solution all figured out, and ready to go. “Here, God: let me just jump in and do *this*,” we tell him. “Let me *say* this... let me *propose* this... let me *engineer* this—and all will be well! God, I’m not stupid; look at all the gifts you’ve given me. Nor am I helpless; look at all the energy you’ve given me! Please, God, just let me *get in there* with my hoe and clippers, and tear up all of these weeds!”

This, though, is where this story gets really interesting. Up to this point, this story has made very good sense and offers very few surprises.

- For sure, we see God’s good seed sprouting up here, there, and everywhere.
- For sure, we see God’s enemy following along right after him, sowing his weeds everywhere God has gone.
- So (of course!) conscientious and morally driven people like us (“**disciples**” who are, on the one hand, God’s “**slaves**,” but who also definitely *want* to be on his side)—*of course* people like us are *powerfully* driven to do whatever we can to *help* God sort this all out! Isn’t that actually (a big part of) what God wants us to do?

Well—sometimes, and to some extent, sure. Several times, St. Paul calls us “**God’s co-workers**” and reminds us that we are “**working together with him**.” (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1; 1 Thess 3:2) But that’s over there, in Paul—not here in this parable!. Here, this “**householder**” says “**No!**”—*No*, do not even think about going out there into God’s field and starting to pull up all those weeds. *Why?* Because of the law of unintended consequences. That isn’t a term Jesus himself uses, here in this story (or anywhere else). But the warning this master gives his servants, shows that that’s totally what Jesus is afraid of. “**Don’t pull up those weeds**”—why?—“**because while you are pulling them up, you may uproot the wheat, right along with them!**” (29) Instead, this owner says, “**Let them both grow up, together, until harvest-time.**” (30) On *that* day, the weeds and the wheat will be properly separated, once for all! “**The weeds will be tied together into bundles to be burned, and the wheat will be brought into the barn.**” (30)

What Jesus means, of course, is that the “competition” between God and the devil is not going to be over anytime soon. That’s the bad news—or (at least) the sad, and disappointing, and heartbreaking side of this story, that makes us wince. “What do you mean, the weeds are just going to *keep on growing*, till the end of the world? Didn’t Jesus defeat the devil when he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday? Didn’t Jesus rip that devil’s bag of darnel right out of his hand, when he declared on the cross, “**It is finished**”? (John 19:30)

Well, yes and no (right?). It’s a paradox (a tense and unresolvable *contradiction*) that—

- the devil is (at one and the same time) both defeated—and “**the prince of this world.**” (John 12:31)
- Death (itself) is both dead and buried—and very much alive, and hungry.
- Sin is both forgiven, and firmly behind us—and a trap we sometimes *fall* into, and sometimes *jump* into.

- Or (going back to the terms Jesus uses in this parable), God both *sees* the weeds growing in his field, and *knows* where they come from—and *chooses* to *delay* his dealing-with-them, until the end of history.

No matter how much you and I would love to pull on our gardening gloves, and get in there, and start weeding that darn darnel *out*—God’s sharp answer is, “No!” *Let* that horrible “invasive species” keep on growing—for now.

The good news is, “for now” is not “*forever*.” Weeds will not grow in God’s field (or in our little garden-plots) *indefinitely*. The harvest-time *will* come when God (as the owner, master, householder, and Lord)—*will* “**send out... his harvesters**” to sort this all out. (30, 41)

On the personal level, if we think of ourselves as “mini-fields” (sort of like all those *separate* garden-beds that make up a *community* garden)—on this *individual* level, *that* will be the time when God will finally, at long last, “**bundle-up**” all of the sin that has wangled its way into our lives, and “**burn it all up**” in the fire of his own redeeming love. (30)

- Our Old Self will finally be finished!—never to threaten us again; never again to sow into our hearts and lives all those dreadful and debilitating “thoughts, words, and deeds” that pit us *against* God (and one another).
- And right at that same moment (“harvest time!”), all those healthy and wholesome “fruits of the Spirit” that God himself has been sowing and nurturing in our New Self (through the power of the Holy Spirit)—all of that “good grain” will be joyfully gathered together, and brought with great ceremony into God’s granary. There, *we* will be *his* forever.

On the wider scale, that same sort of sorting is also going to take place, in all of humanity. Jesus is clear that “**those who do evil**”—and, just as bad, those who “**cause evil to be done**”—*they* will be “**weeded out of God’s kingdom,**” cast aside, and condemned forever. (41) On the other hand, “**those who are righteous will shine like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father**”—not because of any light that they themselves were able to generate, within themselves—but because of the light of God’s grace, which had always been shining so powerfully, and so abundantly, onto them. (43)

So “hang on,” dear friends—be patient! As St. Paul says in our second reading, “**our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us.**” (Rom 8:18) Right now, *absolutely* there is still *so much* ‘*competition*’ going on all around us—and, to be honest, within us too. But the day *will* come when God will *assert* his absolute power over the devil and all his angels, and he will then, at long last, bring all their evil scheming (and mischief-making) to an end.

Never mind those *bothersome*, irritating, and unsightly weeds that spring up here, there, and everywhere. We know where they come from, and we know where they are going. Even more, we also know who we are, and where we are going! And we can be confident that that day is surely coming when (in Paul’s words) “**the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.**” (Rom 8:21)

Thanks be to God for that sustaining promise—which is ours through Jesus Christ, our Lord! Amen.