

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus put a parable before them, saying, "The realm of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in a field; but while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and asked, "Did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?" The householder said to them, "An enemy has done this." The servants replied, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" but the householder said, "No; lest in gathering the weeds you rout up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. And the disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."

Jesus answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with the fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The son of man will send angels, and they will gather out of the world all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the realm of their God. Those who have ears, let them hear."

Sermon 7/17/2011 Susi Kawolics

So this morning I want to tell you of an amazing plant I've learned about. It's a plant that thrives just about everywhere, even in Antarctica. Every bit of it is edible. By pouring hot bacon dressing over its leaves, you get a delicious salad. These leaves have more iron than spinach, plus they're super-high in calcium, Vitamins A and C. You can roast its root and grate it as a coffee substitute, and as such it cleanses the kidneys and the liver. Or if you'd rather, you can use its flower to make wine. Its juice can be applied on skin to fight bacteria and help heal wounds. Its sap can be used to remove corns and warts. Its flowers, when they go to seed, attract birds of all kinds, including indigo buntings, goldfinches and white-crowned sparrows. The scientific name for this wonder plant is *Taraxacum officinale*. When you see the word, *officinale* in a name, it means the plant has been prized for its medicinal properties. We, however, refer to this miracle plant as the "dandelion," that dreaded weed that crops up on our lawns every spring without having been invited, without having been planted by us. We look at this plant much like the servants in our parable looked at the weeds in the wheatfield. We just want to get rid of it!

Jesus often spoke the truths of God's Kingdom in parables. Today's is about a diligent sower who plants his wheat. He is doing the right thing in order to produce a good, healthy crop. Most of us can probably relate to this sower. We too strive to sow good seed in our lawns, gardens and fields. We try to sow good seed in our lives as well, doing the right things, living in accordance to our faith and our beliefs. As such, we expect a good result, a good yield of pure, nourishing wheat. And yet, in our lawns, in our gardens, and in our lives, those weeds, like those dandelions, just keep cropping up.

The truth is that today, just like in Jesus' day, we do not have control over outside forces that influence our fields. We live in a world where, as so clearly stated in the parable, good and evil exist side by side. We take care of ourselves, and yet we still end up getting sick. We work

hard at our jobs, and then still lose them. We try to be the best parent, child, sibling, friend, spouse we possibly can, and yet relationships still break, outside influences still worm their way in, those we love sometimes end up hurt or in trouble. We live as faithfully as we know how, yet weeds of losses, suffering and pain continue to crop up in our lives.

The parable Jesus tells says that the weeds are sown by the evil one. In Jesus time, as well as today, we have to admit to the existence of evil in our world: poverty, injustice, political corruption, oppression, murder to name a few. We need only look at recent newspaper articles which cover the trials of Anthony Sowell and Casey Anthony, ongoing stories of Crisis in the Cuyahoga County Government, animosity among people in confronting issues in our country, unrest, demonstrations and bombings in various places throughout the world. And it is natural that we would see part of our calling as faithful Christians to get rid of this evil.

But as I was looking through the paper yesterday, I also saw a story entitled, “Effective weed killer may be killing trees.” This is exactly what Jesus is warning against.

In our parable, the servants ask the land owner if they should rid the field of the weeds. They want to go out to pull and destroy them so that the wheat is not harmed. This would appear to be a normal and responsible action. Those of you who have gardens know how important it is to get those weeds out before they take over. If you leave them in with your plants, they will crowd out the sun, take the nutrients out of the soil, and all your hard work will be for naught.

But the land owner’s response comes as a surprise: Let the weeds be. The wheat will not be harmed. In fact, the servants will cause more harm by weeding than by letting the field be. First of all, the wheat sown in Jesus’ time was scattered, not planted in neat rows. So there was no way to walk through the field and get rid of the weeds without trampling on everything. Also, the weed that the gospel most likely refers to is known as darnel, and it closely resembles wheat. The difference between darnel and real wheat is recognizable only when the plants mature and the ears appear. The ears of the real wheat are heavy and they droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight. So in trying to pull out the darnel, not only would you harm the wheat by trampling it, you would also take a big risk in mistakenly pulling wheat because it looks so similar to the weeds. This is a risk the master is not willing to take. This land owner is patient, is not willing to make the judgment call because he knows he doesn’t have the wisdom needed to be able to distinguish between what is weed and what is wheat in his field.

This landowner sets a good example for us as well. We can think of the field as the world, as the church, or even as our own lives. In all these fields, we are often anxious and impatient to judge what are the weeds and then to want to get rid of them. In our world, there are often times when we think we can look at people and know immediately which of those two categories they fall into.

Steven Covey in his book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” tells this story of being on a subway in New York. He says “People were sitting quietly, reading newspapers, lost in thought, or resting with their eyes closed, when suddenly, a man and his children entered the subway car. The children were so loud and rambunctious that instantly the whole climate changed. The man sat down and closed his eyes, apparently oblivious to the situation. The children were yelling back and forth, throwing things, even grabbing people’s papers. It was so disturbing, yet that man did nothing.”

Most of us have probably been in situations like that – in stores, in restaurants, in airports, bus stations, maybe even in church. We would probably think that this man and his family needed to be weeded off the subway car, or at the very least, that the man needed a good talking to. Covey goes on to say that when he couldn’t take it any longer, he did talk to the man,

saying “Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn’t control them a little more?”

The man then lifted his gaze and said softly, “Oh, you’re right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don’t know what to think, and I guess they don’t know how to handle it either.”

Too often, we are quick with our judgments, thinking that we know the whole story. Here many of us would have judged this man as a weed of a parent, based on a tiny slice of his life. And even when we think we know someone really well, we need be careful, and to be thankful, that judgment is not up to us, but is ultimately up to God.

The same is true in the church community. We all have our own ideas of what a “wheat” filled church should look like. And perhaps we would like to get rid of those who disagree with us. *Elizabeth Johnson, pastor in Watertown, MN: says: Jesus' parable makes clear that any attempt to root out the weeds will only do more damage to the crop. This has played out far too many times in congregations and denominations, with some determined to root out anyone who does not agree with the "right" interpretation of Scripture, liturgical practice, or stand on a particular issue. There are also those who pronounce judgment on people outside the church -- on people of other faiths, for instance -- declaring them to be destined for eternal damnation. Whether judgment is focused within the church or without, it does serious damage to the church and its mission.*

I have found that sometimes the very people who I would consider weeds are the ones who end up bringing new life into the church. The only way churches grow and change is when someone proclaims something new, and disrupts the way things have always been done. These are usually people who others see as causing trouble. So what are they, wheat or weeds?

As I’ve said, the field in our parable can be seen as the world, or the church. But it can also be our own lives. When we look at our experiences, perhaps there are those we would have classified as weeds that have turned out to be wheat. I can tell you personally, there are events in my life that I would have loved to have pulled out and burned, and gotten rid of completely: My struggles with the Catholic Church, some of the turmoil of raising children, job situations that was less than ideal. But looking back on many of these times, I see that letting those things grow, and become part of who I am has made me more empathetic, more patient, less judgmental. I would have pulled them out of my life, like the dandelions on my lawn, not realizing all their benefits, how they have actually strengthened my faith and enabled me to grow.

I think if we each took a good honest look inside ourselves right now, we could all see weeds growing alongside the wheat of goodness within. None of us are perfect. We all have parts we would rather have rooted out or burned away. Even our great biblical heroes had their weeds to contend with. Our first reading today was about Jacob. He was jealous of his twin brother, and tricked him out of his inheritance. He took advantage of his aging father’s diminishing sight and fooled his father into giving him his twin’s birthright and blessing. Then he ended up fleeing for his life for fear that his brother Esau would kill him when he found out about the treachery. This is not exactly the model for us to live up to. Yet, in our story, this is where we find Jacob, at the lowest point of his life so far. And this is where he has a vision of God. God meets him, reassures him and blesses him.

When we, like Jacob, are at our low points, heaven is still open to us, God’s angels still come down to meet us. There is always an open line of communication between God and us. Whether we’re producing weeds or wheat, God is with us always.

In the end, every field has both evil and good. That is the way of the world, it is the way of the church, it is the way of each of us. But we believe in a God who ultimately promises that the weeds, the evil in the world, will never overpower the good. Our task is not to spend our time pulling up the weeds. Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor says that *"the best and only real solution to evil is to bear good fruit. Our job, in a mixed field, is not to give ourselves to the enemy by devoting all our energy to the destruction of the weeds, but to mind our own business, so to speak--our business being the reconciliation of the world through the practice of unshielded love. If we will give ourselves to that, God will take care of the rest...."*

May we patiently live in the assurance that God's love will never be choked out by the presence of weeds. Let us acknowledge that our job is not to judge, but rather to live out our call to bear fruit. May we live to bring forth and produce that wheat which will nourish and further God's reign on earth. Amen.