

Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds

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Matthew 13:24-30

Sermon Series: The Kingdom of God

I subscribe to Jesus' method of lawn care. I let the weeds grow together with the lawn.

It's like the Olympics, except it's for weeds. The Collegiate Weed Science Contest will be held this year in Carlyle, Illinois. Last year, the competition took place at Virginia Tech. The Collegiate Weed Science Contest has been called the World Series of Weeds or the Super Bowl of Herbicides.

Teams from Canada and the United States will be competing. The Weed Science Contest is a grueling, eight-hour event. Students must be able to identify 80 species of weeds by both their common and Latin names. They must also show proficiency in identifying herbicides. Not only that, but contestants must be able to properly calibrate a herbicide sprayer and know how much product to apply. I tell you, the excitement is killing me!

The University of Guelph has won the event for three years running. This Canadian university has been called the Yankees of Weed Science. The winners this year will be courted by lawn companies, golf courses and agricultural consulting firms.

Jesus' approach to weeding would not have garnered top prize at the Weed Science Contest. When Jesus was asked about whether his servants should pull up the weeds that had infiltrated the wheat, his counsel was to leave

well enough alone. Let the two grow together until the harvest.

I subscribe to Jesus' method of lawn care. I let the weeds grow together with the lawn. You can hardly tell when the grass is cut short.

Who said dandelions are weeds, anyhow? Those bright yellow flowers and delicate puff balls look rather decorative in our yard.

Our sermonic focus since January has been the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not only a place where believers go after they die. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:14-15).

The kingdom of God is the range of God's effective will. When we profess Jesus Christ as Lord, we endeavor to extend his reign into every area of our lives. What we do with our bodies, how we spend our time, what we think about, are all expressions of what it means to follow Jesus Christ as Lord.

Matthew 13 contains a series of seven parables on the kingdom of God. Last Sunday, we examined the Parable of the Sower. Today, our focus is the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, as it is properly called.

Jesus begins his parable with the words, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a farmer who sowed good seed in a field" (13:24). When the farmer and his family are sleeping, his enemy sows weeds

The devil sows his diabolical seeds when our guard is down.

among the wheat (13:25). The Greek word for weed (zizania) describes a type of rye grass that resembles wheat until it is fully mature. Its botanical name is *Lolium Temulentum*, if you really want to know. It is sometimes called false wheat, since it bears a close resemblance to wheat until the grain appears. Since it's hard to tell the two apart, the roots of the weeds and wheat have time to mingle in the soil.

The farmhands ask the farmer, "Master, that was good seed you planted, wasn't it? So, where did all these weeds come from?" (13:27).

"The enemy did it," he answers (13:28).

"Well, then, do you want us to pull out the weeds?"

"No, if you pull out the weeds, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time" (13:29-30).

Jesus tells upwards of 40 parables in the gospels but explains only two of them, the parable of the sower and this parable, whose meaning is enumerated in verses 36-43. Jesus provides for his listeners a virtual lexicon of terms and their equivalents. The farmer who sows good seed is the Son of Man (which is a code word for Jesus). The field is the world. The children of the kingdom sow good seed, whereas the children of the evil one sow weeds. The enemy is the devil. The harvest is the last judgment, and the harvesters are his angels.

Parables typically make one main point, but this parable func-

tions more as an allegory. This parable teaches us about evil, about people and about God.

This parable tells us something about evil. Evil is portrayed in the parable as bad seed, sown by the devil. Some of you will regard this reference to the devil as antiquated. Don't be deceived! As C. S. Lewis writes in his Preface to *Screwtape Letters*:

"There are two equal and opposite errors which we can fall into about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors."

Evil in this parable is sown at night, when Old MacDonald and his family are sleeping in sweet repose. The devil sows his diabolical seeds when our guard is down.

If the devil did his dirty work in broad daylight, none of us would be so easily duped. If the devil was exposed as bad as he could possibly be, who would be tempted?

So, the devil masquerades as an angel of light. He sows seeds that resemble wheat. He dresses evil in fine apparel. Evil looks attractive. The forbidden fruit looks delicious. Sin comes to us like Judas, with a kiss. Why else would we be attracted?

Twenty-four carat gold is considered pure gold. There is a type of iron sulfide that resembles gold with its metallic luster and yellow hue, which has earned it the nickname "fool's gold."

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*There are
weeds in
everyone's
garden.*

Evil is a type of fool's gold. It resembles treasure but make no mistake about it, it spells trouble. Evil is lethal and will kill your soul.

This parable tells us something about people. Let me, for a moment, extend the application of this parable. Weeds and wheat not only exist within the same field, they exist within the same person.

We have a tendency in the church to think of ourselves as the good guys and everyone else as the bad guys. This parable suggests something otherwise. Good and bad reside within the same person. We are a tangled web of good and bad seed. The roots of evil and goodness are entwined in the same person.

The reflection question posed from last week's *Kingdom Calling* devotional hits home. "What dangers lie in trying to label people as wheat or weeds?" Labeling people as pure weed or pure wheat is dangerous, because there are no unqualified good guys any more than there are unqualified bad guys.

Psychologist Carl Jung spoke about the tendency to imagine other people as worse than they really are and to imagine ourselves as better than we are. "Everyone has a shadow side, consisting not just of little weaknesses and foibles, but a positively demonic dynamism." There are weeds in everyone's garden.

Solzhenitsyn writes about our capacity for evil in his massive book *Gulag Archipelago*, about life inside a Siberian prison camp:

"If only it were all so simple. If only there were evil people somewhere doing evil deeds, and all that was required of the rest of us was to separate out those evil people and to destroy them. But, you see, the dividing line between good and evil runs through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy his own heart?"

The result of a truly dedicated campaign to rid the world of evil is that it leads to the abolition of literally everyone. Many good things are weeded out when a judgment call is too quickly made.

This parable tells us something about God. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares concerns itself with judgment. There is a final judgment, to be sure, when weeds will be separated from wheat and sheep will be separated from goats.

So, what accounts for the delay in judgment? If Jesus has inaugurated the coming of God's kingdom, how is it possible for evil to exist in the world?

God allows evil in exchange for good seed to take root. God permits evil for the sake of goodness. God transforms people from weeds into wheat. The apparent delay of judgment is explained in terms of God's patience. Scripture always portrays this delay as evidence of God's forbearance.

Why did Jesus come? He didn't come primarily to judge people. He came to save them.

Jesus doesn't weed Peter out from his inner circle of twelve even though he knows of Peter's upcoming denial. Jesus is all about the

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business of changing Peter's
weeds into wheat.

Judgment will be meted out at
the end time. Our mission is not to
gather around home plate to argue
who is out and who is safe. Our
mission is to sow good seed for
God.

The Pharisees were good
“weeders.” They were meticulous
about weeding out bad people.
They expected Jesus to do some
weeding out of his own. They
wanted him to sort out the good
guys from the bad guys.

Jesus is in the mercy business.
His mission, first and foremost, is
to transform weeds into wheat.

We are not harvesters for the
simple reason that we are not
qualified to make such judgments.
We are sowers. And now is the
time for sowing. Harvesting comes
later. Until then, we join Jesus in
sowing good seed.

We are in the midst of an
“Open Doors-Open Hearts” capital
campaign. But you must under-
stand something important about
this campaign. We are not merely
raising money to pay off a building
debt. We are planting seeds of
faith in Northern Virginia.

Our mission is twofold: To
grow into wheat and to sow more
seed!