



Wheat & Weeds



< Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 >

*24*He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; *25*but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. *26*So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. *27*And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ *28*He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ *29*But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. *30*Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’

*36*Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” *37*He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; *38*the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, *39*and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. *40*Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. *41*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, *42*and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. *43*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!



We might not be so familiar with farming, but many of us know a bit about gardening. And we’ve learned to pluck weeds out ASAP. The shock/surprise in story is that the farmer said to not pluck the weeds **but to wait and see**. Let them grow together. If metaphorically wheat represents the good, and weeds represent evil or sin, then good & evil are being allowed to coexist. Wow! Why?



What we miss in English, is that the Greek word used for ‘weed’ (or tares in some translations) was not a generic weed, but was a specific weed called Darnel or cockle. Darnel looks like wheat until full-grown. *It bears a close resemblance to wheat until the ear appears. The ears on the real wheat are so heavy that it makes the entire plant droop downward, but darnel, whose ears are light, stands up straight.*¹ And the seeds are bitter tasting.

The farmer says, don’t pull up plants because they might be wheat not weeds. You might make it worse. Wheat is valuable and I don’t want to lose any, **AND it is not your job**. The servants are told NO – I’ll deal with it later, not you. **God is to be the judge not us**. This is a lesson in **faithful patience** versus quick zeal. **Judgmentalism is not part of our job description**.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lolium_temulentum

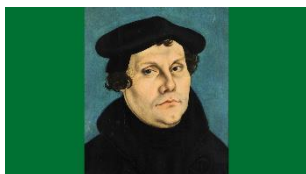


With the hot weather in many US states at this time of year, tragically stories about babies/toddlers forgotten and dying in hot cars get reported all too frequently. This one was from a while back and was a mom who forgot her 18-mo old twin boy, as she took her 6 year old & other twin girl inside.² Luckily his big brother asked to fetch something from the car an hour later, and he was found in time. There are often scant details available on news reports of this type of tragedy and yet, you can read comments full of judgment from strangers who thought it was their job to comment and pass judgment and blame the parents. We have a world that needs Good News and message of Christ - yet it's a world that so quick to blame and judge.

I do want to add a word of caution. This is not a universal rule – it is hyperbole/exaggeration. It is not an excuse for anyone getting away with any bad behavior, and it doesn't mean we shouldn't work to right injustices, but Jesus is making a point here about judgment.

There is a danger in judging others. Who are the wheat and who are the weeds? Do they represent 2 distinct groups of people – the righteous believer and the sinner, or is each of us both the wheat and the weeds representing the good and bad (sin) within us? **Does living with sin without being judged give us a chance to change and for God to bring good out of bad?** Christ's death on the cross was caused by the evil in the world and was redeemed by God. Can weeds change and become wheat?

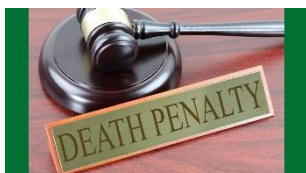
There's times when I feel more like a weed than wheat, when there are things I've done or failed to do. And when I open myself up, God can transform the situation. I'm glad that we are not continually judged, that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible. God can still work through evil to turn it into good. Indeed he can even turn death to life.



Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation, said that *we are simultaneously sinner and saint and that the day will come when the sinner part will be removed and destroyed, so that only saintly part remains.*

If judging others is not what we should be doing, then what are we called to be doing? We are supposed to be Christ-like, and do what Jesus told us to do: love God, neighbor, self. Who is my neighbor? Well that's the subject of another parable! But it includes loving our enemies.

To love your neighbor also means to forgive them. **Jesus said "Let wheat & darnel grow together until the harvest."** The word is *aphete* = "permit," "allow," or "let," but it's most frequent meaning is "forgive." **Forgive them to grow together until the harvest.**³ Instead of holding onto anger which eats away at us, we are called to offer grace & forgiveness & reconciliation to those in our families, church, workplace, neighborhood, and the world.



In the US, 25 states still have the death penalty for serious crimes. Prisoners are held in prison on 'death row' until their appeals run out and they are executed, usually by lethal injection. COVID-19 has been sweeping through some prisons. I read an article the other day, although I could not find it again when I went looking. *It talked of a politician who was celebrating the death from COVID-19 of a prisoner on death row and how he hoped that more on death row would die that way. And saying that it was God's justice.*

² <http://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/local/2014/07/09/north-florida-child-left-in-car-mother-charged/12396309/>

³ http://www.progressiveinvolvement.com/progressive_involvement/2014/07/lectionary-blogging-pentecost-6-matthew-13-24-30-36-43.html#more



We want our enemies to be punished and judged in way we understand justice. How does wishing for the destruction of a man made in God's image rather than his reconciliation to his Maker resemble the heart of Jesus who sacrificed everything for him? Rather than hating our enemies, we are called to be ministers of reconciliation, not destruction. **We want so much to be the judge.** These parables take a lot of wrestling with.

In mysterious ways, when we offer grace and forgiveness and love for all God multiplies our personal efforts and interweaves the work of others and uses them to transform the world. When we offer forgiveness, we are transformed ourselves. We find purpose and meaning and hope comes into our lives. We discover our true selves when we serve Christ with compassion. We learn that abundant life comes from loving not fearing.



This is a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven. Judging is not up to us in the kingdom, but loving others is. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" – we remind ourselves of this every week as we pray the Lord's Prayer. We are part of the kingdom of God, here on earth. Parables cause us to search for the truth that that is thrown alongside. It is a truth that can only be found in that crazy mixed up field in which God plants his seed, and in the love of Christ Jesus our Lord, who gave himself over to death so that we might live abundant lives.

Let anyone with ears listen!
Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Explanation of the Series

The word parabola literally translates "to throw beside". A closely related word is parable, a story that is not true, but true-like, or "thrown beside" the truth. Jesus taught in parables, and they are full of wisdom that is masterfully woven in story form. In this sermon series, we are examining three farming parables about planting seeds from Matthew 13 to see what truths we can uncover on the wayside about faith, life, and the Kingdom of God.