

"Wheat and Weeds"

July 23, 2017

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

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ

7th Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

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?'

He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'

But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

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.'"

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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."

He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

A Kingdom Parable

Wheat and weeds. Darkness and light. Good and evil. Sowing and reaping. These are the ingredients that go into today's parable. Jesus teaches in parables. There's usefulness in his parables to exercise the mind, and to excite and stir the imagination. Almost like a riddle, or in the Eastern traditions, what some would call a koan. An parables can answer questions, and there's usually a question behind a Jesus parable. Since Jesus always talks about the kingdom of heaven, this parable, and others in Matthew's gospel, answers the curious question of Jesus' audience as to what this kingdom of heaven is actually like.

So Jesus says,

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away."

The Bad News: Evil Exists

It's a kingdom parable. Great! The greatest storyteller in all history can shed some light into the meaning of life. But what we hear is what can only be classified as as bad news: There is evil in this world. And according to this parable good and evil live side by side in this world. What is evil, and why does it exist?

Evil exists since near the beginning of humanity when all of creation fell in the paradise garden when free will gave in to a temptation by that same enemy that Jesus talks about in this parable. That is when evil entered in. Before that, there were no weeds in the Garden of Eden. This was the kingdom of heaven on earth. This was God's will, undamaged and life-giving; what says is "good." But when the guard was let down, evil snuck in. This is how this enemy works. Slippery, undercover, in the darkness of the night. When does the enemy come?

"While everybody was asleep, the enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away."

And now we live with it. But evil cannot stand in the presence of God, God therefore must remove all of it. And God will only do this at "the end of the age," as Jesus says it.

Why not now? Why can't we pull up the weeds? Why does God allow evil to exist? It's a question we have been asking all our lives, once we discovered there is a darker side of life; once we found there's such a thing as slavery, oppression of people groups, that there's people who would hurt children, and there's some who would lie, cheat, and steal.

And then we are taught in this parable that destroying evil is not ours to do; this is in God's hands only; and in God's time, and in God's way.

What to Do?

Even the disciples call Jesus into question when, after hearing Jesus tell these parables, they say,

"Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." Because when we look around there are evil weeds everywhere. Just ask the ladies who gardened the

church grounds this past week. What are we going to do with all these weeds?! And they keep coming up.

What do this mean for us? What are we to do with all the evil in the world?

The answer comes back strong yet odd in this parable: *Don't do anything!* When the workers say to the Master,

"Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?"

The Master replies, *"No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 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."*

At this point the roots are intertwined, entangled; pull up the weeds and the wheat might be pulled up as well. Furthermore, unless you know what you are doing, good plants and bad often resemble each other.

The world is a mixed field of good and bad seed. The church is a mixed body of sinners and saints. Each of us is troubling mix of darkness and light. Be careful not self-appoint as the judge over who is in and who is out. This is judged by God alone. in the harvest at the end of age when all evil will be removed and burned off like the weeds from the field. It's a good thing God does come here and now to settle things.

It's our blessing that God happens to be extremely patient with the field. It seems God is waiting for the bad ones to repent, to turn around and move in the opposite direction; certainly God is waiting for the church to repent from its sometimes damaging ways; I know God waits patiently for each of us to turn from what brings us to our own destruction to that which brings us life.

The Good News: We Are Children of God

We live in a unique situation. Because we also wait. The kingdom of heaven and the reality of Jesus has now intersected with the kingdom of this world and our reality; all is now moving in the direction of culminating into the kingdom of heaven. But it is not fully realized. We live in the tension of the already and the not yet. Remember what Helen read from Paul's letter to the Romans this morning:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The good news is we are children of God, not children of the darkness. When born and baptized in Jesus Christ, we are born of good seed and we are rescued from the bondage of being sown with bad seed. When we follow the Master of all Creation we are no longer imprisoned by the enemy; we are not going to the place of destruction, but are being welcomed into the kingdom of heaven.

When shown just a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit, a desire takes root at the core of who we are—the desire to be children

of God. And we mess up a lot, but God is patient. Through the gift of God's grace, given in spite of our nature, we are steadily growing into this identity.

The test, then, is of perseverance, of staying true to God, and continuing to follow the ways of Jesus and embracing the identity of Christ within us even while evil is all around us. Today's parable is about the kingdom of heaven, an unusual but present reality—a reality God establishes in which there can be no evil, no sin, no darkness at all. It has happened! This is the Jesus reality. Amen.