

"Being Counterintuitive"

[Contrary to what one would intuitively expect]

Sermon: July 23, 2017

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Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43

Today's Gospel lesson is another agricultural story from Matthew. It is called the Parable of the Weeds. Unlike last week's, The Parable of the Sower, it places no value judgment upon the soil. In today's "wheat and the tares" story the seed and the ones tending the field may be good or evil.

Jesus' listeners would have been familiar with references to a field full of wheat and the accompanying weeds. They, as followers of Christ, were living in a time of persecution – with no political power, but they did have a hope of soon-to-come "day of harvest," e.g. Christ's return.

The references you have heard in this parable to "sons of evil" and "sons of the kingdom" may seem somewhat strange and remote. I suggest that we try to hear this parable in a way that enables us to be "faithful" and "trusting" in God's mercy and judgment.

If you have ever started plants indoors in seed trays you may have noticed that weed seeds, fungus spores, even insect eggs from the previous years may flourish in a protected environment. Even sterilized potting soil doesn't guarantee a perfect environment for the seeds. Some weeds always seem to prevail.

The hearers of Jesus' parable didn't know anything about seed trays but they DID understand the problem of "tares" in the wheat crop -specifically **BEARDED DARNEL** – *a kind of weedy annual grass often growing in grain fields and other cultivated land, a grass, [Lolium tementulum], related to rye, having bristles on the seed head and bearing seeds that yield a narcotic poison.* It looks like wheat until it matures, therefore one cannot separate the two before the time of the harvest. Yes, both Jesus and his audience would have known about weeds.

But the weeds in the parable are more than unwanted plants. Jesus isn't preaching about "farming." Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God – more specifically about those who worry about being choked out by evil.

There is a Peanuts cartoon in which Lucy tells Charlie Brown this, "*Charlie Brown, you are crabgrass in the lawn of life.*" She is saying that he is a blemish on her life – something that keeps her life from being the way she wants it to be. As people of faith we might blame such people for interfering with God's plans. We can name our own crabgrass.

The church is frequently prone to this kind of thinking as we judge and evaluate people around us - keenly aware of the "tares" in the field – people who seem to spoil and impede the life to which we think followers of Christ are called.

We might consider these examples as *people weeds*:

1. People who demand a lot from the church and then leave it for "*another one.*"
2. Or those who come up with ideas for programs or volunteer but aren't around for the executing of them – leaving others to pull it together.
3. Or folks who, under the guise of "prayer concerns" are really gossiping.

Generally speaking, weeds would be those that, we feel keep the life of the church, or the community or even family from realizing God's fullness. And there are times that we want to do the weeding of these folks.

That's what the servants in the parable want to do – rush into the field and yank out anything that looks like a weed.

BUT, the servants have a few errors in their thinking:

- 1.They think that a perfect field of wheat is possible
- 2.They think that the harvest depends entirely on them.
- 3.And most seriously, they doubt the owner of the field and they risk blaming him for the weeds.

Like us in the church, the servants have good intentions. They think they know God's plan. But there is a fallacy in that thinking not only for them but also for all of us. The book of Isaiah tells us that *God's thoughts are not our thoughts; nor are God's ways our ways. For the heavens are higher than the earth, so God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours. We don't know God's plans for the wheat field.*

Don't we sometimes act as if the harvest depends upon our manipulation of people and situations? We think that the field belongs to us and anyone who is not like us is a "weed." Sometimes it's expressed in the terminology "them" and "us" or "our" church or "our" community. Just like the servants in the parable we are sometimes guilty of such thinking.

But this parable is about something more than that.

This parable gives us a glimpse into the way God sees the field. The Kingdom of God is more than just putting up with a few weeds in the wheat or reluctantly deciding to associate with those weeds we would rather avoid.

The parable is about two forces that are diametrically opposed. They are described in another Peanuts comic strip. Lucy tries to explain to Linus about the existence of good and evil. She tells him that he, like all of us, has these two forces inside himself. With a very troubled look on his face, Linus states, "I can feel them in there fighting."

That's the wheat and the tares. Good and evil in battle everywhere - in the newspaper and on the news – a force that seeks to destroy all goodness, hope and health. Whatever you call it – the devil, Beelzebub or Lucifer, "the evil one," action that separate us from God – its purpose is to *spoil* God's kingdom. We could just call it the "enemy" of God

Jesus makes this clear in the parable. He describes weeds growing alongside wheat, weeds that imitate the good grain – that have intertwined their roots with whatever has been planted.

That's just the way it is. The roots of the "enemy" of God grow among the grace, love and obedience of the wheat – the good – whatever good we try to bring to Christ.

None of us can ever avoid the influence and temptations of these roots and there are times we want to fight back. We want to yank out what we perceive as the "evil." We rush to judgment. We have a strong urge to find something to cut out, weed out, push down, crush, otherwise stop and destroy.

And in the parable, here are the servants in front of the owner of the field asking his blessing to carry out these actions.

This is where Jesus offers a suggestion that some might consider **counterintuitive**. You know the statement, "Don't just stand there; do something!" Well, Jesus says, "Don't just do something; stand there." This suggests that Jesus wants us to stop chasing after the bad, and look at the good.

Jesus implies that we are not in the business of judging or destroying what we perceive to be against God's Kingdom. We are to spend time tending the wheat – the good – in love. This action would be considered counterintuitive to what we really want to do.

If we look at both of the Peanut's cartoons sited this morning, we can see Lucy with the good and evil fighting inside her as she is tempted to rid her lawn of the crabgrass which she perceives Charlie Brown to be. In the light of the history of the world we can see that giving in to the desire to wipe out the crabgrass or evil hasn't always worked. [This is a subject for much debate and discussion and might even imply that the parable is a totally impossible one]

If we look at the lives of people such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King, or the writings of David Thoreau we see that they chose to nurture the wheat [good] rather than tear out the weeds [bad].

When we look at Jesus' life we can see the ultimate example of this parable. Crucified on the cross, Jesus didn't seek to destroy his enemies. He chose to forgive them. He looked to God to sort it all out in the end. Here is the power of the parable – the resurrection.

The Story of the Two Wolves



An old Cherokee Indian chief was teaching his grandson about life.

"A fight is going on inside me," he told the young boy, "a fight between two wolves.

One is evil, full of anger, sorrow, regret, greed, self-pity and false pride.

The other is good, full of joy, peace, love, humility, kindness and faith."

"This same fight is going on inside of you, grandson...and inside of every other person on the face of this earth."

The grandson ponders this for a moment and then asks, "Grandfather, which wolf will win?"

The old man smiled and simply said, "The one you feed."

This story reminds us to continue to take responsibility for cultivating and nurturing the good.

Every day. Every moment.

It reminds us that every day we make choices, important choices that could be overlooked as being trivial – and these choices define us. They are a statement of who we choose to be in this life and what impact we will have on the world around us.

It reminds us that even when the outside world is demanding, the state of our inner world should always be our primary concern because without inner balance, without mindfulness, we cannot properly live in harmony and wisdom with ourselves.

Theologically, when we leave the weeds - whatever is in the world, or in us, that poisons our humanity and breaks our relationship with God to the fires of God's everlasting love we can turn our hearts and the hearts of those around us to nurturing the good wheat that God has given us.

Let us pray:

We confess, God, that there are times we only see the tares and we become discouraged and bitter and want to take matters into our own hands, or question the goodness of the seed that you have planted. Forgive us, and deliver us from our shortsightedness, and equip us once again to become faithful and patient servants in your work. AMEN.

MATTHEW 13: 24 – 30; 36 - 43

²⁴He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.'"

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