

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 19, 2020
“Waiting for the Harvest” (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

Last Sunday we heard the parable of the sower and the seed. Not only did that parable display the four kinds of soils – or hearts – that receive the Word of God, but it also demonstrated for us that God has some peculiar farming techniques. He sows the seed of his Word recklessly and haphazardly. He scatters it everywhere and in every way so that it might find a place to take root and grow.

This week – with the parable of the weeds in the field – we discover once again that God’s method of farming is much different than ours. And for that we should be very thankful.

We’re all familiar with weeds, aren’t we? We know what a nuisance they can be. They grow in our fields, gardens, flower beds, and yards. Even when there is no rain, the weeds continue to grow, and if not controlled, will take over everything.

My first experience with weeds came when I was a young boy. My dad put a hoe in my hand and sent me to the garden. Hoeing around the squash, cucumbers and beans was not a challenge at all. Those plants are easily identifiable. But when I got to the corn, it became a challenge. There was Johnson Grass growing alongside the corn. For an eight or ten-year-old kid, separating the grass from the corn seedlings proved to be a very trying task. They just looked so much alike. As a result, in taking out the weeds, I took out about as much corn. And dad was not a happy camper.

The same sort of dilemma faced the farmer in Jesus’ parable. As Jesus tells the story, a man sows good seed in his field. But that night – while everyone is sleeping – an enemy comes and sows weeds right in the same field where the wheat seed has been planted. No one realizes this, of course, until it is too late. In the early stages of its growth, the weeds (called bearded darnel) so closely resemble the wheat that it is impossible to distinguish between the two. Only when both have formed heads is the difference apparent. But by that time, the roots of the wheat and weeds are heavily intertwined. When the servants realize the field has been sabotaged, they go to the master and ask, *Do you want us to pull up the weeds?*

Last week I said that Jesus’ parables almost always held an element of surprise or shock. They were often a reversal of his listeners’ expectations which would move them to a new understanding. The surprise in this story comes right here with the master’s response. He says that the weeds should not be removed, but allowed to grow alongside the wheat until harvest.

Everyone knows the importance of removing the weeds – even if it means sacrificing a healthy plant or two. Even Jesus pointed out in last week’s parable that seed which fell among the weeds and thorns would eventually be choked out. So, the servants naturally want to eliminate this problem. But the master tells them to let the two grow together, for in pulling out the weeds, they might damage some of the good wheat. They should just wait until the harvest, and at that time, the two would be separated.

This parable teaches us that even though God has planted good seed, there is always a hostile power at work in the world seeking to destroy what is good. The world is filled with both wheat and weeds: believers and non-believers, righteous and unrighteous, those who seek to do good and those who seek evil. But the problem we face in our limited human wisdom is that we can't always tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds.

Those of us listening this morning will tend to identify ourselves as wheat. We consider ourselves wheat because we place our faith in Jesus and try to sincerely follow him by living our lives as he calls us to live. And when we look around our field, it may appear that there is a lot of wheat growing. But remember, the weeds look just like the wheat. Only when something happens – when someone we've considered wheat does something to reveal their evil nature – do we realize that there are weeds among the wheat.

And what is our reaction to this evil? It's the same as the servants in the parable. We want to get rid of the weeds so that the wheat can grow unhindered. We want the weeds plucked up and destroyed. We don't want their influence in our field.

But God's word is very clear: *Do not disturb it or you may ruin the whole field* (like I did with the corn in my dad's garden). *No matter how careful you are, you will end up pulling wheat as well as the weeds. You'll hurt the innocent, and my people are too precious for that. Just leave them alone. It's better to let the two grow alongside each other. The wheat is too precious to take the risk of destroying it by mistake. Just be patient until the final harvest.*

So, another thing this parable teaches us is that we need to avoid passing judgment on others. Pulling weeds is God's job.

If we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that there are wheat and weed in all of us. Just as we don't want to be written off as a weed based on one or two negative words or actions, we should not be quick to discount others based only on a snapshot of who they are. Only God knows the whole person. He knows our shortcomings and he knows our potential for good – our potential for serving him and building up his kingdom.

Because of his great love for his creation, and because of his desire for each of us to know and serve him to the best of our ability, God allows the weeds and wheat to grow together. He gives us time for the good in us – and around us – to positively impact the evil in us. He allows the good and the evil in the world to grow together so that the wheat might influence the weeds.

I want to share another weed story with you even though it doesn't paint me in a positive light. The grass had been sown just a week or two before we moved into our new home in Rockwell. Because there had been a lot of rain that Spring, the grass came up quickly and began to thrive. But it quickly turned unseasonably hot and dry. As a result, my new grass began to turn brown and bare spots began to form. But somehow, the weeds continued to grow. Front yard, back yard, weeds everywhere, but very little grass.

When they were about at mid-calf height, I decided I couldn't live with them any longer. I went to Lowes and bought a bottle of Weed-B-Gone – one of those bottles you attach to a garden hose

and then spray the yard. Early one morning I went about this task. I covered every inch of the yard with the spray – anticipating the day those weeds would be gone. But as I finished an hour or so later, I discovered, to my dismay, that I had the same amount of Weed-B-Gone in the bottle as I did when I started. You see, I didn't turn the switch that allowed the chemical to mix with the water. (It helps to read the instructions) All I did was water those weeds!

And I believe that's what we as Christians need to do. Because we can't distinguish the wheat from the weeds, we need to water everything in our fields. We need to sprinkle the world with God's love. And with God's Spirit working in and through us, the good in some of those weeds we sprinkle will grow and flourish. We'll find that when we focus on the good in others, miraculous things can happen. What's more, when we sprinkle this love and goodness around, it serves to make what is good even better. It makes us better as we grow in Christ and his service.

So, instead of pronouncing judgment and going on a weed-pulling expedition, we are to focus on what is good. And we are to do what is good: to bless instead of curse, to praise instead of criticize, to love instead of hate, to forgive instead of resent, and leave the judgment to God alone.

I think the owner in this parable was very wise. He wanted to protect the good. That's the reason he planted in the first place – to have a good crop of wheat. And that's why he didn't allow the servants to pull the weeds –so that the wheat would be protected. That's God's purpose as well: to love us, protect us, and grow in us a faith in God's guidance and presence.

In every life there are some weeds. We may more easily see them in our neighbor's yards, but they are in ours, as well. But the parable reminds us that God has also sown good seed – in us and in the world. God has fed, cultivated, nourished, and cultivated its growth. And to cultivate and nurture the good seed wherever we find it is the only way to a harvest of good crops – in us and in others.

Shall we pull the weeds that are among us? No, just wait faithfully for the harvest which belongs to God alone.