

**Matthew 13:24-43**

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

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

### July 19, 2020 - Matthew 13:24-43

This morning's parable of the weeds and the wheat, calls us not to weed. **Don't weed out people...** by giving up on them! Here's a little story.

One upon a time a battered parish priest approached his bishop.

I want to retire, he said.

You're not old enough to retire.

Yeah, but I'm worn out. My laity are fighting, my young people don't come to Church. My parish Council has no guts. My teenagers drink too much. A couple of people are trying to take over the parish. Others can't stand the tension. Offerings are down. Kids are breaking windows and writing graffiti.

The bishop sighed loudly. Let me tell you about **my** problems. After they had exchanged woes, the two men sat in silence for a few minutes.

Well, said the bishop, congratulations on having a lively parish. The kingdom of God is just beyond your reach. So the pastor went home and did not resign.

This parable deals with a very practical problem in the church and everywhere. Any group we're in, we find negative mixed with positive. Every congregation, every community, every family has members who are not perfect; some have flawed personal lives -- the business methods of some are questionable -- some treat others unkindly -- or won't help out. ...false wheat in the field of human life.... Who has not wanted to be rid of the bad apples that spoil the barrel?

But the master in the parable does not want his workers to weed the garden. That's odd, isn't it? Normally, we pull out the weeds. We eliminate the undesirable in order to let what we want flourish.

The Master says

**"Let them both grow together"...**

Why? Because gathering the **weeds** would uproot the **wheat** as well.

So the Master says 'Let them grow together'. The word used for **let** in Greek, also means **forgive**. It is the same word used in the Lord's Prayer for **forgive** us our trespasses.

So there is forgiveness tied into this word 'let'...

a sense of **'leaving be' out of mercy**.

'To grow together' is a verb...an all-in-one action...growing together. The togetherness of the roots of both weeds and wheat is important. Their roots are so

entwined that to pull up the weeds would damage the wheat. The good and the evil are opposites, but they are intermingled very closely. If we apply this parable to ourselves, **we** are not entirely weed or wheat; we are a bit of both... **both** weed and wheat...an intermingling of both health and disease, virtue and sin. Given that we are both wheat and weed, Our Lord's instruction is to let us be, to let us grow through the growing season...in order to give us every chance to flourish. Not until the harvest will the weeds and the wheat be separated.

The good news of the gospel is that **conversion** can happen. In God's kingdom...weeds can actually be transformed. Through God's grace, even weeds can become valued wheat.

St. Augustine says of this parable

“There is this difference between people and real grain and real weeds, for what was grain in the field is grain and what were weeds are weeds. But in the Lord's field, which is the church, ...what was grain turns into weeds and at times what were weeds turn into grain; and no one knows what they will be tomorrow.”

We are called to **growth**. This parable warns that our growth will be constantly challenged. Our work to be fruitful in God's kingdom will be in tension with the weeds, the weeds within us and around us. Despite the weeds, our mission is to bear fruit, to bring life, rooted in Christ.

Bearing fruit is our daily calling, not weeding. We do not need to concern ourselves with the weeds or with their removal. Yet so often we do just that. The master's slaves want to remove the weeds for him. But he says “Let them grow together.” Weeding is done later at the harvest. It is done by God's special messengers, the angels.

The problem with weeding is that although we think we know, we just don't know who are the weeds are and who are the wheat. God has not equipped us with the insight necessary to weed the garden. How quickly we can judge someone to be a weed.

There is a plant called dandelion that looks just like wheat. Only when the heads appear can you tell it from wheat. The word Jesus uses for weed, is zizania – which means ‘bearded dandelion’. As the plants mature, the roots of the dandelion and wheat intertwine, making them almost impossible to separate -- any attempt to pull the weeds will also pull the wheat. Separation, eventually, is necessary, because dandelion is both bitter and mildly toxic and ruins the flour

In McAdam there were water lilies on the pond where the steam engines used to get their water. Their flowers are exquisite...but some would regard them as nuisances which stop the water flow. A weed can be “anything a farmer doesn’t want at harvest.” Corn is a weed in a soybean field!

The disciples to whom Jesus explains this parable were far from perfect. They include Judas, who will betray Jesus (26:47 ff.)

-- Peter, who will deny him (26:69 ff.)

-- Thomas, who will doubt him (John 20:24 ff.)

-- and James and John, whose concern was personal ambition (20:20-23; cf. Mark 10:37).

In the end, only Judas will be lost.

How quickly do we judge ourselves as being worthy of being “harvested” while others are judged to be weeds. As human beings, we are **both** ‘saint’ and ‘sinner’. Aren’t we all as bad as we are good? If we point the finger at the weeds, aren’t we also condemning ourselves? But it is often our own ‘weediness’ that is most difficult to see.

Here is a poem

*I dreamed of death the other night, And Heaven's gate swung wide,  
An Angel came with halo bright to usher me inside.*

*And there! To my astonishment Stood folks I'd judged and labeled  
As "quite unfit", "of little worth" And "spiritually disabled."*

*Indignant words rose to my lips, But never were set free.  
For every face showed stunned surprise -- Not one expected ME!*

So let us lay aside the tasks which are not ours. The weeding and the judgment are not ours...God in his wisdom will handle them. What we do know is that God’s very substance is love and forgiveness. God is patient. God ‘let’s us be’ during our growing season to give healthy growth every chance so we may bear fruit for Christ. We are called to do the same. Amen.

Do you remember the Beatles song ‘Let it Be’?

You may remember the chorus...

”Let it Be, Let it Be, Let it Be, Let it Be...there will come an answer, Let it Be.

We are not called to tolerate the intolerable. There are times when it is necessary to confront a person or an issue and to speak the truth in love. There are even times to end a relationship firmly —particularly if there is abuse or violence – but the reality is that we are sinners living among sinners. If we demand too much, condemn too quickly, or break off relationships too easily, we doom ourselves to a lifetime of broken relationships or perpetual loneliness. We who hope to receive grace must also be willing to extend it.

Have you seen the movie ‘In My country’. It’s about 2 reporters following the ‘Truth and Reconciliation talks’ in South Africa after Apartheid had ended. These

hearings, suggested by Nelson Mandela, were aimed at bringing about reconciliation between the white Africaans and the blacks. You can understand what a challenge that was after such a regime as Apartheid. The truth was that hurts were inflicted on both sides...the weeds and the wheat were not easily recognized.

We are told that at the harvest, when Christ returns...all will be restored and that whatever is not of God will be discarded. How that will happen, we do not know. O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will.

But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted; remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering – our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all of this, and when they come to judgment, let all the fruits which we have born be their forgiveness.

The very real evil that others do is not to be answered by pulling out the weeds, by attacking and destroying the people responsible. Doing so only adds to the harm. Instead, our response is forgiveness.