

Sermon, July 19, 2026
The Rev. Jay L. Kanzler
Matthew 15:24-30, 36-43

In the name of the Father , Son and Holy Spirit.

To build something special takes time. Think about what it takes to plant a garden. First, you must prepare the soil. That includes removing the grass, weeds, rocks, and roots, and raking the soil until it is even. Maybe you add some compost. Then, you have to properly plant the seeds or the shoots to the right depth and space them correctly. Finally, you must water the garden – a lot.

Then comes the waiting. After a number of days, a sprout or two. Then a few more. The growing process is slow. It takes patience. It requires perseverance. Each seedling is a miracle.

But then come the weeds. In a real garden, there isn't an evil one who visits in the night, sowing seeds of weeds. Yet, the weeds always find their way into the garden, and if left unabated, they will overtake the garden.

Now, I understand today's Gospel. It's pretty straight forward – there will be good and there will be bad, and when the second coming occurs, you don't want to be a weed.

But I'd like to take my parable in another direction. As followers of Christ, we cannot simply hope that we make it. We have a responsibility to make sure our neighbor makes it too. We do that by tending to God's Garden here on earth. We must ensure that all God's seeds flourish. Think about that for a moment. We are responsible for seeing that all God's seeds bloom.

God's Garden must be tended, or it will become overgrown. Sure, many of the seeds will grow and make it, but others, they will be choked out by the weeds. They will not receive proper water or sunshine. They will wither. They may die.

It doesn't have to be that way. God has shown us how to make a difference. God has given us the skills and the tools to be master gardeners. The Garden of God must be cultivated each and every day. It's hard work.

And be careful not to mistake a struggling plant for a weed.

Poverty, mental health issues, bad choices, a lack of second chances, pain and sadness. This is bad soil. They are encircled with strangling ivy. They are parched in a patch of weeds. They struggle. They perish. They are not weeds. They are seeds in need of tending.

Let me share a quick story about a criminal client that has been challenging. She is a college-educated women in her late forties. She was an engineer at one point. But then, mental illness and drugs left her unhoused, living in a riverfront homeless encampment, and making bad choices that brought her into the custody of the St. louis County Jail.

I was able to obtain a her release on bond, but she failed to appear for her next court date and a warrant for her arrest was issued. And, as is always the case, she was re-arrested and back in jail. This time, I worked with her social worker and her counselor in the County Jail to find her a bed in a local women's rehabilitation facility. I convinced the judge that my client was finally ready and that releasing her the facility for treatment was a good idea. I even promised the judge that I would make sure she got to the rehab facility. The Judge agreed to give her another chance.

And when she was released from jail, she snuck by me in the lobby, headed for the hills, and has not been seen since.

She is not a weed. She is a very fragile plant. A frustrating, fragile plant. But still a plant. And when she is eventually returned to jail, I will continue to try and help her. You would too.

You see, there have been points in my life where people could easily have mistaken me for a weed. I looked like a weed. I acted like a weed. Heck, I probably even smoked too much weed. But for the Grace of God, I might have withered like a weed.

Instead, God turned to those around me to tend to my small patch of the garden. They staled me up, watered me, fed me, and never gave up on me. I thank God for placing those family members, friends and neighbors in my life; but I truly thank those family members, friends and neighbors themselves for what they did for me.

Because not everyone is so lucky. Not everyone has family members, friends and neighbors. Take five minutes today to remember a time when you looked like a weed, or the world mistook you for a weed, and remember who came to your garden patch. Who refused to give up on you? Who let you become the wheat that makes it to the barn?

We will not always be successful. Our efforts may in fact fall on deaf ears. We might hear, "Mind your own business," or "You couldn't possibly understand what I'm going through." Hopefully we are all willing to risk some rejection in the hopes that we might also hear, "Thank you for taking the time just to listen," or "Thanks, it was just what I needed."

So head out into God's Garden, trowel at the ready, and be the reason that every seed sown by God has a chance to grow.

Amen.