

Sermon for Pentecost VI Year A 2020
Wheat and Weeds Growing Together

Where did these weeds come from?

Whether you are a gardener or not,
who has not at some point asked that question?
We may not have used those exact words
and we may not even have spoken them aloud . . .
yet, I'm fairly confident that everyone has—at one time or another—
asked such a question . . . and probably quite recently,
if not this very morning!

Who hasn't read or watched the news and wondered,
“How did our world get in this shape?”
“How did we get to this point?”
“Why and where did this Covid-19 virus come from?”
“Why is there so much animosity and ugliness among us?”
It seems as if the world is going crazy.

Maybe we ask questions that are even more personal, like:
“How did my life get like this?”
“What has become of me?”
“What will become of me?”
We could all list the hurts and wounds of life,
the betrayals and resentments,
the addictions, fears, and loneliness.
The list, as they say, can go on and on . . .

Perhaps, for others, the question has been prompted
in the face of the death of a loved one,
a devastating illness, or some other tragedy and we want to know,
“Why, *if* God is good and loving, did this happen?”

Where, then, did these weeds come from?

We often live with the assumption that if we do good,
work hard, and be “nice,”
everything should work out just as we want or imagine it should.
That’s the illusion with which the slaves in today’s parable live.

Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

Of course, he did.

They know he did.

That’s why they are so surprised when they discover the weeds.

The weeds have shattered their illusion.

This isn’t supposed to happen.

Where, then, did these weeds come from?

There is an urgency to their question.

They want to know what happened and who is responsible.

And, frankly, so do we.

That’s what we want to know

when we discover weeds in our fields.

We want an explanation and, better yet, *someone* we can blame,
hold accountable, and even punish.

Far too often we see that in our political bickering,
our Facebook posts,
and, yes, our privately held opinions.

Jesus, however, seems less interested in this approach than we are.

He doesn’t give it much time or attention.

An enemy has done this, he says.

That’s it.

He doesn’t explain it.

He doesn’t even identify or name the enemy.

He doesn’t give instructions to find, drive out,
and punish this enemy.

Behind our desire for an explanation
and desire for the name of the culprit is a truth
many of us neither like nor want to accept.
It's one of the challenges of today's gospel.

And, here is one thing we all need to keep in mind:
The gospel *always* challenges the way we think,
the way we see,
the way we act,
and the way we live.
It's the challenge to become *more* than who we
or the world thinks we are.
It's the challenge that arises every time
we face the "weeds" of our life and the world.

The reality is, according to Jesus,
our lives and our world are a field
in which good and evil,
life and death,
joys and sorrows,
that which we want and that which we don't want,
all grow and live side by side.
The wheat and the weeds stand together in our lives and in the world.

That—Jesus says—is what the kingdom of heaven is like—
that is, the kingdom heaven here on earth.

You may not think that sounds much like good news, *and, yet, it is*.
Because it means that despite the weeds in and around us,
the kingdom is here, now;
God is present in the field of wheat and weeds.
The weeds do not overcome or make absent God's kingdom.
It may not be the fullness of the kingdom,
nevertheless, God's presence is here—
in, with, and among the wheat and the weeds.

But still, we want to cry out, what about *those weeds*?!
What do we do about *them*?
Surely, we should do something . . . right?

Well, no. At least not according to Jesus.
Let them grow together . . .

That really doesn't seem to make any sense, does it?
How can we let them come together?
After all, the weeds are bad and the wheat is good!
We must *do* something.
We need to take a stand, draw a line in the sand,
establish some boundaries.

Don't you want us to pull up the weeds?
No, the master says,
for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

Now these weeds aren't just any old generic weeds.
The parable speaks of a particular weed called *zizania*.
It's sometimes known as darnel or false wheat—
basically the botanical equivalent of “wolves in sheep's clothing.”
It grows with the wheat.
It looks like wheat.
Its roots intertwine with the roots of the real wheat.
And its seeds can cause hallucinations and even death.
But the difference between the two is not always readily apparent;
it's a tricky thing to separate that false wheat from true wheat.
So, it seems the separation between the wheat and the weeds
is not as clear cut or “black and white” as FB,
the media, politicians, and our personal opinions
would often have us believe.
As good old Martin Luther of yore, long ago pointed out:
we sinning saints and saintly sinners are not that adept at
knowing what is good and what is evil . . .
or what is wheat and what is a weed.

He said we often call what is evil, good, and what is good, evil.
Which is why, perhaps,
we are not the ones to make the ultimate judgment.
We are not the ones to uproot those we see as weeds.
Jesus is very clear about that . . . and not just in this parable—
In his great Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus says:
Do not judge, so that you may not be judged . . .
Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye,
but do not notice the log in your own eye?
In other words, what makes you think you can tell
what is good and what is not?

Let them grow together until the harvest . . .
Unlike most of us, Jesus shows more interest in growth
than extermination.
He is willing to wait and to be patient.
So what does that mean for us?
If we are his followers,
we will need to wait and be patient amongst the weeds in our life.

While we patiently wait,
it is best if we not get too excited about the end of this parable.
It’s best if we don’t revel and celebrate or even ponder
the end of the age and the coming of Jesus
as some kind of “divine weed-whacker.”
Jesus didn’t intend for his listeners to take this parable so much literally,
but, rather *with absolute seriousness*.
After all, good sometimes has unfortunate consequences,
And out of tragedy blessings can emerge.

So . . . where does that leave us?
Do we do nothing?

Again, no, that’s not what Jesus is saying.
There is plenty for us to do and it will be a challenge.

Here's what I mean:

The words that are translated as "let them" in the parable as in
Let them grow together . . .

can also be translated as "forgive them."

These are the same words Jesus spoke from the cross
in the gospel of Luke's account of the crucifixion—

Father, forgive them, (Let them . . .)

Even then, even on the cross,

Jesus is unwilling to pull up the weeds.

This means, I believe,

that there is no place in Jesus' gospel for Christian vigilantism,
by word or by action,

against another or against ourselves.

Instead, Jesus commands love.

Love your enemy.

Love your neighbor.

Love yourself.

Love God.

Yet, as I just said, good sometimes has unfortunate consequences,
and out of tragedy blessings can emerge.

Let them grow together . . .

We see this in the life of the late John Lewis,
the beloved congressman and civil rights leader.

He had many encounters with people who had wronged him
and done evil to him and his loved ones in the past.

In February 2009, Congressman Lewis met with the man
who had beat him and left him lying in a pool of blood in 1961
when Lewis was only 21 years old.

Nearly 50 years later, that man came to his office,
accompanied by his son, to apologize and ask forgiveness.

"Mr. Lewis," the man asked, "will you forgive me?"

Do you accept my apology?"

“Yes, I forgive you, I accept your apology,” Lewis replied.
The man’s son started crying,
and then the man himself began to weep
and so did Lewis along with them both.
They embraced each other and began calling one another brother.
And the man and his son from that time on
visited Lewis often after that encounter of reconciliation.
Let them grow together . . .

What if we all learned from brother Lewis
and practiced love, forgiveness and non-violence?
What if we followed his example of being a forgiving sinner
whose saintly humility and faith shaped
the way we think,
the way we see,
the way we act,
and the way we live?
Might we, too, transform our communities for the better?

Let them grow together . . .
Forgive the weeds?
Love the weeds?
Yes, according to Jesus, that’s what we are called to do.

The gospel is always a challenge.
So, the answer is yes—forgive them, love them.
Because, perhaps, that’s how the wheat begins
to disentangle its roots from the weeds
and show itself to be wheat and not weeds.

It seems that life in the kingdom of God in this world is
all about love and forgiveness.
Thanks be to God, *let them grow together . . .*