

Title: "May I Give Her Your Name?"

Text: Matthew 13:24-30

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Jesus told a parable about a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. When the wheat began to grow and produce heads, the weeds appeared as well.

The servants came to the owner and asked, "Master, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

The owner replied, "An enemy has done this."

Then the servants asked the question we would ask, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

Of course. Isn't that what farmers do? Isn't that what sensible people do? There are weeds in the field. Remove them.

And then Jesus gives us the answer that catches us off guard. **(Slow it down)** The owner says, "No. Let both grow together in the harvest."

Not "not yet, but soon. Not "be careful." Just, **(Pause)** "No. Let both grow together until the harvest."

Why say that? (Pause) Pulling weeds is not a bad instinct, but it is simply an instinct applied too early. Because in that field, at that moment, they cannot see clearly enough to know what they are looking at.

In the ancient world, there was a weed called bearded darnel, which looks almost identical to wheat until the head appears on the stalk. A person could honestly believe they were doing the right thing and still destroy the very crop they were trying to protect. Pull too soon, and you do not just remove weeds. You uproot wheat.

The servants are not wrong that weeds exist. They are wrong to believe they are qualified to decide which plants have a future. And that may be the hardest part of this parable, because we understand weeds. We know what we would like to remove. Sometimes those weeds are in ourselves: our failures, our regrets, and the parts of our lives we wish we could simply pull out by force.

But Jesus reminds us that God is more patient with us than we are with ourselves. The owner does not shame the wheat into growing. The owner tends to the whole field. The owner waits, trusting that what looks unfinished today may become something beautiful tomorrow.

When I was a boy, my family camped with kerosene lamps. Each night, before lighting one, my mother made me clean the glass shade first. I hated it because the soot was stubborn, and by the next night, I was cleaning the lens again. But my mom understood something I did not: the shade never stayed clean on its own. Someone had to keep coming back to it. That is what God does with us. God does not clean us up once and walk away. God keeps coming back. Again, and again, and again, God keeps returning for us, even when we are convinced we are nothing but a weed.

Jesus lived this parable before he ever told it. The people Jesus refused to give up on were often the very people others had already given up on. He ate with sinners. He welcomed outsiders. He restored Peter after he failed him. He never confused someone's unfinished life with God's unfinished work.

But the danger of this parable is not only how we treat ourselves.

The greater danger is how quietly we decide who matters in the field and who is worth tending. We do not announce it. We are more subtle than that. Have we ever realized that two months had gone by since we'd spoken to someone? Have we ever assumed someone else would make the phone call? Have we ever looked around the church and suddenly realized that someone was simply... gone?

The church rarely loses people all at once. We lose them one unnoticed Sunday at a time. We stop calling. We stop asking. And after enough quiet neglect, people begin to wonder whether anyone would notice if they disappeared. Sometimes weeds are not discovered. Sometimes weeds are created in our imagination when we stop tending the people God has placed in our field.

And Jesus says, "No."

Years ago, I served at a rather large church in Richmond called (believe it or not) First Presbyterian Church. The church was large enough that someone could attend every Sunday and still feel invisible.

One Sunday morning, I was rushing to a Presbytery Youth Council meeting across town. I stopped by the choir room to drop something off. The choir members were putting away their robes. I passed Katherine (we called her Kitty), who was a woman I knew well. She was taking off her robe and holding a coat hanger.

"Kitty, I really enjoyed the anthem this morning," I said.

She looked at me. "Well, I hope so, because that's it."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm hanging it up."

Because Kitty had been in that choir for many years, I assumed she meant she was retiring. I commented that she would be missed in the choir. She shook her head. "No. I'm quitting. I have had enough of it."

"Why? Kitty, why are you quitting?"

She paused. "Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, I really want to know."

"I finally faced a question that's been haunting me for years. I sat up there this morning and looked out at all those people, the ministers, the choir master and organist, the elders, and the ushers, and I finally realized what was bugging me for a while: who cares? Who will miss me if I am in the choir or not? Whether I'm even here or not. So, this is it for me!"

I made some kind of inadequate statement as I fumbled and looked at my shoes, and I did need to leave for my meeting. But I could not stop thinking about a woman named Kitty quietly slipping out of her robe, wondering if anyone would notice.

When I got home, I called her. “Kitty, may I come talk with you?”

“If you want to,” she said.

So, I went. We sat in her living room for about an hour. I listened. Eventually, after listening to her name, her concerns, and what she wanted to say. I told her why I had come.

I said, “Kitty, today you reminded me that a church can become busy and still become blind. You named one of the great spiritual dangers of the Christian life: acedia. We usually translate it as sloth, but that can be misleading. Acedia is not simply laziness but is a spiritual indifference, a slow forgetting that anyone’s life matters, including our own. We get the word apathy from it, and it means, ‘I don’t care.’”

“So?”

“Well, Kitty, I think you are wrong. I care. We care.”

She looked surprised.

“Then name someone.” (Pause)

Name some. (Pause) I have never forgotten that statement. She was not only asking whether the church cared. She was asking whether she mattered. Nobody had voted her out. Nobody had announced she was unwanted. She had simply reached the conclusion, on her own, in the quiet, that the field would grow just fine without her.

And Jesus says, “No. Let both grow together until the harvest.”

That is not permission to stop tending the field, but Jesus commands us to keep loving what we do not yet fully understand. The owner never says, “Ignore the field.” The owner says, “Do not pretend the harvest has arrived.” The harvest belongs to God, not to us. Our calling is much, much smaller: to tend, to notice, to care, and to believe God is still working in people whose story is not finished.

The person sitting beside us may not look like wheat yet. Their faith may be fragile, their life complicated, and their questions uncomfortable. But they belong to the Lord of the harvest before they belong to our judgments.

So here is what I am asking. Not “who are the weeds?” Jesus already answered that, and it was never our job to ask it. This week, I want us to think about and call out one name from memory. Someone we have quietly stopped watering. Someone whose phone has been quiet. Someone whose name has crossed your mind more than once. Someone you have not spoken to in far too long. Someone who, if they stopped coming, might take a few weeks before anyone even noticed the empty seat.

And then call them. Not to fix them. Not to check a box. Call them just to say, “I noticed you. I’m glad you are here.” Friends, we are a church discerning God’s future together. And in

seasons of transition, the temptation is to spend so much energy asking where we are going that we forget to ask who is walking beside us.

Because somewhere near you today or in our recent past, someone may be quietly taking off their robe. And the Spirit is asking: “May I give her your name?”

Someday the harvest will come. On that day, we will finally see what we could not see before. We will discover that God was growing wheat in places we almost gave up on, including us. Because the harvest belongs to God, and the mercy that brought us this far will be the mercy that carries us home.