

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?’ ²⁸He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.’” ³⁶Then 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.” ³⁷He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Who Gets to Pull the Weeds?

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

La Habra United Methodist Church

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Hazel Werner tells the story of a woman who was always complaining about her neighbor's laundry. One day she called a friend to the window and said, "Look at those clothes hanging on the line. They are gray and streaked." Her friend looked for a moment and said, "I think the problem is not her laundry. I think the problem is your window."

That is a simple story. But it stays with you. Because how often do we do the same thing? How often do we look at someone else and assume we know what we are seeing? How often do we make up our minds before we understand the whole story? We do it quickly. We do it confidently. And often, we do it without even realizing it.

That is why this parable matters.

The Parable of the Weeds is not only about good and evil. It is also about the patience of God. And it is about the danger of raking into our own hands work that belongs to God alone. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. Everything begins well. The seed is good. The field is planted. But while everyone is asleep, an enemy comes and sows weeds among the wheat. Later, when the plants begin to grow, the servants notice the problem. Wheat is growing—but so are weeds.

So they go to the master and ask, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" And the master answers, "An enemy has done this." Then the servants ask the obvious question: "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

That sounds like the right question. In fact, it sounds like the faithful question. "Do you want us to fix this?" "Do you want us to clean this up?" "Do you want us to get rid of the problem?" But the master says, "No. For in gathering the weeds, you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest."

That is the point of surprise of the parable.

The surprise is not that weeds exist. Of course weeds exist. Every farmer or every gardener knows that. The surprise is that the master does not remove them right away. The servants want immediate action. The master chooses patience. And that patience tells us something important about God.

Jesus is not pretending evil is harmless. He is not saying the weeds are imaginary. Evil is real. It damages lives. It resists the work of God. It distorts what God has planted. Jesus does not deny any of that.

But Jesus does tell us this: for now, wheat and weeds grow together in the same field.

Later, when the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable, he tells them plainly what it means. The sower is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age. The reapers are the angels. In other words, there will be a harvest. There will be a reckoning. Evil will not have the last word. God will bring justice.

But that final judgment does not belong to us.

And that is where this parable begins to press on us. Because if we are honest, most of us assume we already know who the weeds are.

We may not say it out loud. But we think it. We know who is wrong. We know who does not belong. We know who is the problem. And, of course, we assume we are the wheat.

But Jesus does not seem very interested in helping us identify the weeds and do something about them. Instead, he challenges our desire to do so.

That is hard for us. Because we like clear categories. We like to know who is right and who is wrong, who is in and who is out, who belongs and who does not. We want quick clarity. We want certainty. We want to sort the field. But Jesus says, **“That is not your job.”**

And maybe that is the word some of us need to hear today.

There are things that belong to God and **not** to us. There are judgments that belong to God and **not** to us. There is a harvest that belongs to God and **not** to us.

This parable is not telling us to ignore evil. It is not telling us that right and wrong do not matter. It is not telling us to become indifferent to injustice. But it is telling us to be humble about our own vision.

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Because we do not see everything. We do not know every story. We do not see every wound. We do not know what grace may still do in a person's life. That is why Jesus invites us to look inward before we look outward. Before we spend our energy trying to identify the weeds around us, perhaps we should tend the soil of our own lives.

I introduced to you about John Wesley's question, "How is it with your soul?" last week. That question is a reminder that we need not with examining everyone else's soul, but with examining our own.

That is why early Methodists asked one another, "How is it with your soul?" Not, "How is it with your neighbor's soul?" Not, "Tell me everything wrong with the people around you." But, "How is it with your soul?"

That is a holy question.

Because it turns our attention where it belongs. Not toward pride. Not toward comparison. But toward repentance, grace, and growth.

And that leads us to the heart of the sermon.

If we are not the reapers, then who are we? We are the servants in the Master's field. We are not the reapers. We are the cultivators.

We are not called to decide the harvest. We are called to tend the field. We are called to nurture what God has planted. To water. To encourage. To strengthen. To protect. To help faith grow.

That is what the church is called to do. We are called to plant hope where there is despair. To offer forgiveness where there is resentment. To sow peace where there is conflict. To speak truth in love. To encourage faith where there is doubt. To bear witness to the kingdom of God without

pretending we are the gatekeepers of the kingdom of God. And we need to hear that, because sincere people can still do great harm when they are convinced they are defending the truth.

Churches have divided because people were too certain of their own judgment. Communities have pushed people away because they were misunderstood. People have been wounded by those who thought they were protecting what was holy.

That is why this parable calls us to humility. It also calls us to trust.

Notice what the servants do in the parable. They bring their questions to the master. They ask, “Where did these weeds come from?” and “What do you want us to do?” And because they ask, they receive more than an answer. They receive perspective. How often does that happen in our own lives?

We come to God wanting a quick solution, and instead God gives us a deeper trust. We ask for immediate action, and God gives us patience. We ask God to remove the problem, and God teaches us how to remain faithful in the middle of it.

That, too, is part of the Christian life.

Not every prayer changes the field right away. But prayer can change the way we stand in the field. Prayer can deepen our roots. Prayer can steady our hearts. Prayer can teach us to trust the Master more than our own instincts. And that matters, because we are living in a mixed field.

We see kindness and cruelty in the same world. Generosity and selfishness in the same community. Courage and fear in the same family. Faith and doubt sometimes in the same heart.

Sometimes we look around and wonder whether evil is winning. We wonder why injustice lasts so long. We wonder why the weeds seem to grow so easily. And maybe that is why this parable is such good news.

This parable reminds us that the presence of weeds does not mean the Master has abandoned the field. God is still at work. The Holy Spirit is still moving. The Gospel is still changing lives. Grace is still growing wheat in the middle of a broken world.

And the good news is this: the weeds do not get the final word. The harvest belongs to God. That means we do not have to carry responsibilities God never gave us. We do not have to sort every soul. We do not have to settle every judgment. We do not have to force the harvest before its time.

We are not the reapers. We are the cultivators.

So perhaps the question this parable leaves with us is not, “Who are the weeds?” Perhaps the question is this: How can I be a faithful cultivator in the field God has given me? How can I encourage someone’s faith this week? How can I strengthen rather than tear down? How can I show the patience that God has shown to me? How can I plant mercy, hope, and peace where I am? Because that is the work we have been given.

The harvest belongs to God. But the field has been entrusted to us.

So may we tend it well. May we tend it humbly. May we tend it patiently. And may we trust the Master of the field. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Congregation’s Response to the Message:

Gracious God,
thank you for your patience, your mercy, and your love.
When we are quick to judge, teach us humility.
When we are tempted to take your place, teach us trust.
Make us faithful servants in your field—
planting hope, sowing peace, and bearing the fruit of Christ’s love.
Help us to leave the harvest in your hands
and to walk in faithfulness, grace, and compassion each day.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.