

Sermon – July 19, 2020
“Weeds in the Garden”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church
Pastor Dave Schilling

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Let's pray, "O Lord, speak to each of us wherever Your love finds us this morning, speak to us in our minds, speak to us in our hearts, speak to us by the words of my mouth, and in the thoughts we form. Speak, O Lord, we, your servants, are listening. Amen

How would you define a weed? We can all generally recognize a weed, but the word itself seems hard to define.

Here is how the dictionary defines a weed...

"Weed - a plant that is not valued where it is growing, and is usually of vigorous growth; especially one that tends to overgrow, or choke out more desirable plants."

I confess that I have pulled up many weeds in my day, only to find out later that perhaps they were not really weeds. During those times, I must confess that Naomi was not very happy with my help.

In the parable we are looking at today from Matthew 13, Jesus talks about weeds in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the church, so Jesus is talking about weeds in the church.

And He makes it very clear that weeds are not a good thing. In fact, He says that weeds in the church will not experience a good ending.

The topic of this parable of course is judgment, and my guess is that when Jesus first shared it, it caused a lot of raised eyebrows.

So, in this parable, Jesus is the sower, the soil represents the whole-world, and the seed that Jesus is sowing represents believers ... followers of Jesus. Jesus is sowing us.

The main issue in this parable is people. Jesus is teaching that people can only meet one of two different ends. With that as an introduction, let's look at a few major lessons we can learn from this parable.

First , we need to recognize...

1. Jesus Is Active ... He is the main active participant in this parable ...

The two major functions that Jesus performs are sowing the seed, and supervising the harvest.

And the visual I have of this parable is Jesus sowing the seeds with complete abandon. He is throwing an abundance of seeds in every corner of the world. He is not at all concerned with how many seeds He uses. He is sowing all His Kingdom people.

In Canada, a believer once sowed seed with abandon as well. He operated a large, 2,500-acre grain farm. When asked how he planted the seed, he pointed to a distributor that was some thirty feet wide.

"We take that double tandem truck, fill it with certified seed, back it up to the distributor, open the slots, and pour in the seed."

He said, "If you are ever going to be cheap, don't be cheap with the seed."

God's Word is never cheap, it always results in mighty returns, if we but believe and are willing to invest." God says, "Believe Me and trust Me, and see the kind of harvest I will give you."

The Apostle Paul guarantees this principle of truth from God's promise...

"And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. " 2 Corinthians 9:8

All blessings, all things, all times, and all you need. There are four promises in one breath.

Jesus is certainly willing to invest. He sows the seed as He shares his message with every nation, tribe, people, and language.

And I think it's pretty cool that Jesus is spreading His message using us ... His people ... not just here in our community, but throughout our country and the world. And the results fulfill the prophecy we read in Revelation 7...

"...there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb ... And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."
Revelation 7:9-10

Here is the bottom line ... Jesus is not just sitting around in heaven waiting for everything to finally get done, and then come back into our world.

He is active today – planting more seeds in our community and all over the world.

Why? Because the job is not done yet. As broken and as IMPERFECT as we may be, Jesus calls us to be His seed. Jesus is active entirely through us. He has no plan B. We are His seeds.

The second major lesson from this parable is the fact that Jesus is not the only one who is active. The Enemy Is Also Active

There are some who say that the enemy was able to get away with sowing weeds into the wheat, because the servants of the Savior were lazy, or taking a nap. But the issue here more likely is that the enemy is sneaky and malicious.

I think one of the most dangerous attitudes within Christianity today is that Satan is just hiding somewhere until the end times when Jesus returns. Consequently, there are some who do not take his threat seriously.

But be assured the enemy is working very hard against Jesus. For example, one of the ways Satan is active today is the very action that Jesus described in this parable – Satan sows people who cause sin and do evil within Christ’s church.

Notice Jesus says that Satan causes sin in two ways – he entices others to sin in some way, and he and his followers do evil themselves.

The odd thing is that you would think that the people in the Church would recognize this kind of activity, and “weed it out” before it got out of control.

But unfortunately, it is not the case in many churches, who seem to tolerate and even become breeding grounds for the weeds.

Why do you suppose we do that? Well, I think there are several reasons. Perhaps the major reason is that we are all generally conflict avoiders. We hate conflict.

But I think there is also another reason that these dangerous seeds are allowed to grow, and that is seen in our third lesson from this parable, and that is that there will be confusion in the congregation.

The weed Jesus was referring to in His parable was probably a weed called, “bearded darnel,” which looks a lot like wheat when it’s young and can only be distinguished when it matures.

One question we need to wrestle with is this ... “Just who are the weeds?”

To answer that question, there appears to be two lines of thought ... the weeds are either...

- Unbelievers, or
- Hypocrites (or those wearing both shoes)

Here is how one author stated the issue (Ray Stedman)...

“...notice that a major point of this parable is to give us a clue to the way that the enemy works most successfully.

It is by imitation, by counterfeit. How simple it would be if evil people would only look evil.

If hypocrites would only snarl and growl a little bit, it would help so much. But they always look so pleasant. They always talk so sweetly. They are such nice people, and that is why we go along with their ideas. We cannot believe that such nice people could go so far wrong.

And, unless we use the Word of God to evaluate their teachings, we can be deceived by the niceness of people who are imitation, counterfeit apostles, as the Word of God calls them.” End Quote.

But regardless of whether they are unbelievers or hypocrites, the fact remains that initially the crops look the same. But these people are false believers who only appear to be true believers.

That is one of the reasons they are allowed to grow and even prosper in a church. Their appearance and behavior is deceptive. These people are pretenders, not believers.

So, what is the key to recognizing wheat from weeds?

I believe it is simply the Transformation in our lives that stems from our faith in Jesus.

Having said that, we all know that there is nothing simple about transforming a life. But here is what I am talking about...

A person of the “wheat” category is one whose life has been changed by the transforming power of Christ and the Word of God. They are striving to live for Christ as much as they know how.

But if a person claims to be a Christian, but causes others to sin, or sows seeds of sin within the congregation, or is in willful, unrepentant sin themselves, then they are not wheat, they are weeds.

And what is the only measure we can use to evaluate if our behavior is sin or not? The Word of God, of course, there can be no other standard for truth than the Bible.

If the Bible says it's sin, then it's sin, whether anybody else thinks so or not. And when we find sin anywhere, even in the church, we need to deal with it.

Leaving a weed to grow without doing something to stop the spread is a dangerous thing to do because of the harm to the good plants around it.

The church needs to do the same thing, but in a way that Jesus says will not “uproot the wheat that's in place”. That is important.

Jesus taught in the parable that uprooting the weeds might cause damage to the wheat. And God is not willing to risk that, particularly since He would depend on people to uproot the weeds, and you know how perfectly we would do that!

Even though God hates sin, and He knows that sin affects and hurts his church, He will not wholesale get rid of the weeds, because to do so might hurt those who are wheat.

However, there will always be confusion in the congregation if we do not deal with the weeds.

As God deals with the weeds in His way through us, it results in our last lesson from this parable, and that is the recognition that there will be a final separation.

The bottom-line is those who belong to Christ will be separated from those who don't. Period! It is black and white.

Those who don't belong to Christ will suffer God's judgment. Why? Because weeds can spread and choke the life out of the wheat ... weeds can bring harm to others around them.

This was not a popular message in Jesus' day, and it's not a popular message today, either. After all, who wants to think about judgment?

And it is for that reason that some people refuse to believe in a God that will judge people and send them to hell.

But when someone tells me they don't believe in that kind of God, I have to simply answer, “I hope you're right, because you can't AFFORD to be wrong.”

If I am wrong about Jesus, then no big deal – we just die and that’s it. But, if you are wrong about Jesus, then you’ll have eternity to regret it, and that is a big deal.

Jesus is very clear here that there will be a separation, whether we want to be part of it or not.

This is one tough lesson from Jesus. These aren’t just fluffy words about harps in heaven, or comfort here on earth. These are words about judgment ... the judgment of God, who just happens to be the final authority with these matters.

And if you are feeling convicted, if you are feeling like you have done some things you know God will NOT easily want to forgive, boy do I have some news for you today.

2 Corinthians 5:17 using the Living Bible Translation says this, “When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!”

The good news simply stated is ... “God can make you into wheat!”

It starts by becoming a Christian, of course. And we become a Christian by placing our faith entirely in Christ, recognizing that we can do nothing to help our cause before Him. He has done it all for us as a gift of grace.

We become a Christian by admitting our need to be forgiven for our sins, believing that Jesus died and rose again for our sins, which freed us from the penalty of death ... the penalty we deserve.

When we are Baptized, God’s Holy Spirit comes to live in us, to lead us into a faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit helps us live more godly lives in accordance with God’s will.

We are a new creation. It may not seem like it right away, and it may take some time to change the old ways. But your new identity is “wheat!”

So, I want to leave you with this basic truth this morning ... there is no other path to God, there is no other plan as Jesus says in John 14:6... (let’s read this together)

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.” Amen.