

Gospel & Sermon July 23, 2023
8th Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone
“God weeds. We sow.”



“God does not require us to eradicate the weeds of this world. God has not appointed us to judge between good and evil. So we are free to sow seeds of love anywhere and everywhere. God will sort out the rest.” --Pastor Jaime

Gospel of Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And 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?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’”

The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let 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.’ ”

Then 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.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who

sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

Sermon by Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone

“God weeds. We sow.”

I hate waiting. And I waited a lot last week.

Some of you know I was on jury duty for a couple of days. And many of you know what that’s like. I waited in a security line. I waited in two different waiting rooms. I waited inside two courtrooms and at least four different hallways.

Now, I take jury duty seriously. It’s part of being a responsible citizen. But I still hate waiting. I imagine most people do. We wait at restaurants, in traffic, in doctor’s offices, in grocery store lines, on hold with insurance companies. And today Jesus tells us we even have to wait as evil grows up around us like weeds in a wheat field.

But Jesus: What if the weeds take over? What if they grow up like the thorns in last week’s parable and choke out God’s word? What if they choke out those things we love about our lives and our communities and our churches? How can we just stand by while that happens?

The servants in Jesus’ story don’t want to wait. They know an enemy has sown weeds in their master’s good field, and they have got their gloves and their hoes and those mini pitchfork tools, and they are ready to start weeding. And their master stops them in their tracks: Not so fast. Wait. Let the weeds grow alongside the wheat until the harvest. What? Why?

Well, if you pluck up the weeds now, you’re going to pull up a bunch of wheat, too. The landowner knows his servants cannot easily tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds. The weeds sown in his field might have been a common and poisonous variety that looks a lot like wheat until harvest time. You can try pluck it out earlier, but you’ll uproot some wheat, too.

Maybe that would be a reasonable risk for the average farmer. It might be a risk you take in your own garden. But it's not an acceptable risk in the kingdom of heaven. Better to wait till the harvest. We wait as weeds grow up around us, because we can't always tell the difference, and our eradication efforts might do more harm than good. We might think we know the difference between the wheat and the weeds. We want to believe we are mostly good. And we want to believe we know who's mostly evil. But Jesus knows better. Jesus knows our hearts.

Who is the person with the biggest, best heart you know? The one always doing those helpful, thoughtful things that never even occur to you? Who comes to mind? Do you think they have ever done anything bad? How bad?

Now who is the worst person you know? Or the worst person you can think of? No need to name names. But do you think they've ever done anything good? Could they ever do anything good enough to outweigh the bad?

Where's the line between good and bad? Between good and evil? How wide is the border between them - the place for those of us who feel like we're basically OK? Who's good enough to reside there? Who's in? And who's out? People who claim to follow Jesus have been trying to set the criteria for centuries. The church continues to find new ways to ask the same old question: Who's in and who's out?

Who's circumcised and who's not? Who's a heretic fit only to be burned at the stake? What do we do with those people who reject Jesus? People of different faiths? Or no faith? What about Christians? Who's a real Christian? Who's a real Lutheran? Who belongs in our pulpits? Who belongs in our pews?

Which sins can be forgiven, and which can't? Who is beyond God's reach? Whoa! All that judgment is exhausting work. We can't bear the burden. ***And the good news is, it's not our burden to bear.***

We wait, even as weeds grow up around us, because it's not our job to judge between the weeds and the wheat. The wheat and the weeds will eventually be separated, but the servants won't be the ones doing it. That's a job for the reapers. Evil will eventually be eradicated, but we won't be the ones doing it. That job has been assigned to the angels.

So what is our job? Do we just wait helplessly? Sit back and watch the weeds grow up around us? Maybe our answer lies in last week's parable, the one about the sower who scattered his seed everywhere: 'Not just on the good soil, but on the road, in the rocks, and among the thorns.'

We don't wait idly. Our job is to sow. Same as last week. We sow the good seed of God's word anywhere and everywhere. We are free to just be sowers. God has not appointed us to judge between good and evil. God does not require us to eradicate the weeds of this world. So we are free to sow seeds of love anywhere and everywhere. God will sort out the rest.

We can be assured of that. We can be assured by those words we heard this morning from the prophet Isaiah. God is the first and the last. God will have the last word. Evil will not. "Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one."

Do not fear. God is more powerful than any weed. Evil *will not* choke out the kingdom of heaven. Evil *cannot* choke out the kingdom of heaven. And at the right time, God's reign will be fully revealed, in all its glory. In the meantime, we are free to love each and every neighbor like they will be seated right next to us at the heavenly banquet. Because they just might. We don't know, and we don't decide. That is not our job. Our job is to sow.

Our seeds of love will not eradicate evil, but they will cause more and more goodness to grow up around us. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." That is our holy work. And the Holy Spirit works among us, tilling and fertilizing and tending the soil of the mission field.

The Holy Spirit also works within us. Because the truth is, we are both saints and sinners. Wheat and weeds, good and evil, grow alongside each other in our own hearts. In the landowner's field, wheat and weeds may be tangled up, but they are distinct. Proper care will not transform a weed into wheat. But God can transform a heart. God can transform our hearts. Isn't that worth waiting for? It's what all creation is waiting for.

Pastor Jaime

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