

**“A Farmer in the Fields of the Lord”**  
**10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 11**  
**July 20, 2008**

Texts: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 / Psalm 86 / Romans 8:18-25 / Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (p. 1040 of the Pew Bibles)**

**The Parable of the Weeds**

24 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ 28 He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29 But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

**The Parable of the Weeds Explained**

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” 37 He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

This is our second installment of Jesus’ so-called Parables of the Kingdom. Last week we talked about the Parable of the Sower, where the seeds were the Word of God. This week, in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (or Wheat and Weeds), the seeds are us.

In 1993, with a three-year-old and a new baby, Beth and I moved into our first home. Prior to this time we had lived in rentals and apartments, but now, we finally owned our own home, a modest 70 year-old, three-bedroom, one-bath affair on North Hills Boulevard, along one of the many dogwood trails of Knoxville, TN. We were proud of our little home, but had little money for sprucing up the yard, other than cutting the lawn and trimming the

bushes. But, that first year Beth bought several butterfly bushes to put in the back yard. As I recall, those butterfly bushes had beautiful purple flowers, when they were in bloom. But, they only bloomed for a short period of the year, and after they bloom they look a lot like a scraggly weed. So, soon after they had bloomed, I had forgotten their placement in the yard and, with great zeal, mowed them all down. I finished trimming the hedges and sat back to look at my beautifully manicured yard. And then Beth came outside to view my handiwork. “Uh, so, where are my butterfly bushes,” my lovely wife asked. “Butterfly-who?,” I replied quizzically. I had mistaken her butterfly bushes for a common weed and proceeded to do what I thought best, which was to eliminate them. The small amount of money that we had for these plantings I had carelessly ruined in my zeal for the perfectly manicured yard. I thought I could distinguish weeds from flowers, but I soon found that I couldn’t. And so we come to Jesus’ Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

Many of you may also have had experience with the plant called kudzu. Most folks these days curse the kudzu plant. I am told it can grow up to a foot a day and up to 50 feet a year typically. I have seen whole fields and groves of trees covered so extensively with the noxious weed that it creates its own sort of mountainous landscape. Kudzu covers everything, trees, bushes, plants, blocking out the sun to more beautiful plants and trees.

But the kudzu plant was introduced into this country as a godsend. It was first presented in this country as an exotic shade and forage plant at the Japanese Pavilion during the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. During the Depression, the Soil Conservation Service used kudzu extensively to stop soil erosion during the many road and building work projects generated at this time. In the 1940s, there were actually Kudzu Garden clubs sprouting up all over America. But, by the end of the 1940s farmers began to report that kudzu was overtaking orchards, choking out fruit, and braking down baling machines, and railroad engineers claimed that it was causing trains to slip off their tracks. The one-time darling and godsend was now classified as a weed. All to show that sometimes it is very hard for us to differentiate between a weed and a useful plant or god-send. And, further, sometimes the usefulness or beauty of a plant can vary with time or situation.

With this understanding, we read the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (p. 1040 of your Pew Bibles). Matthew's Gospel begins,

“[Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man [37b = “*The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.*”] who sowed good seed [38b = “*the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.*”] in his field, [38a = “*The field is the world,*”]”

The very first verse of this parable is chock full of meaning. We can look back and forth to verses 36 to 43 to gain a better understanding of this parable. But, verse 24 sets the stage. The Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a man [who is explained as the Son of Man, of Jesus] who sows good seed [good seed being the Sons of the Kingdom, or those who truly listen to and obey Jesus Christ] in his field [the field being the world]. Notice first that Jesus is in charge. That is the first Good News. Bishops aren't in charge...clergy aren't in charge...wardens aren't in charge...in the end only Jesus Christ is in charge of the Kingdom of Heaven. And He and only He knows who the good seed is in His field, the world. Notice secondly that the field is not the Church, but the world. All seems to be well in the world. There is only good seed and a field filled with good seed in good soil, because it is the Son of Man's field. But, this doesn't last. Verse 25 says,

25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy [39a = “*and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.*”] came and sowed weeds [38c = “*The weeds are the sons of the evil one,*”] among the wheat and went away.

A once good field, the world, has now been infiltrated by Satan, the field owner's enemy. This happened because somebody fell asleep. Somebody was not being watchful. We can attribute the beginning of this sowing of weeds to our ancestor Adam in what is often called Original Sin as detailed in the third chapter of Genesis. But, we also sow weeds in the Lord's field every time we choose to sin, to rebel against God.

And now, the field, the world, has not only good seed [those who follow Jesus Christ], but bad seed [those who do not follow Jesus Christ, but follow Satan]. You know that don't you, that there are only two choices – to follow Christ or to follow Satan. If you are not sure that you are following Jesus Christ, then you are following Satan. Did you know that? There are no fence-sitters in the Kingdom.

Now, many of us want that field to look nice and neat and green, and uniform. But, that is not what the Lord's fields look like. The Lord's field is messy. He is the kind of landowner who, being longsuffering, will put up with the weeds mixed in with the wheat.

Lest you think that this is not such a big deal, the world of Palestine in the eastern Mediterranean during the time of Christ was dependent for survival upon bread, which is made from wheat. The common weed of that area is the bearded darnel – a plant that looks an awful lot like wheat when it grows...is nearly indistinguishable from wheat, in fact. But, in the end the seeds from the bearded darnel can cause blindness and even death. If there are too many seeds of darnel in the grain used to make bread, then the bread itself can be deadly. So, Palestinian farmers would often remove the bearded darnel weeds carefully from the field once or twice before the harvest. So, to let the darnel weeds and wheat grow together would seem like a horrible risk for any landowner. Yet, that is just what our landowner the Son of Man, Jesus Christ says for us to do.

Now, Jesus is not saying that we do not make judgments in this life about good and bad, right and wrong. Of course, we are called to be wise and discerning. But, His point is that we are not allowed to make the final decision, or even be involved in that decision, whether a soul will live with Him in life eternal or eternal damnation. That is His decision alone. Furthermore, we are to nurture all in the Kingdom of Heaven...to let all grow...because we worship a God who can transform even those apparent weeds into golden wheat.

The parable of the Wheat and the Weeds continues (beginning at verse 26),

26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest [39b = "*The harvest is the close of the age,*"], and at harvest time I will tell the reapers [39c = "*and the reapers are angels.*"], Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

These verses, 26 through 30, indicate a transition in the Kingdom of Heaven. We see that the Kingdom of Heaven is not only in the present, but also projects into the future. And Jesus doesn't so much create the Kingdom of Heaven in the afterlife, but recreate the

Kingdom of Heaven and return it to God. There is the Kingdom of Heaven right now which includes both good seed and bad, wheat and weeds, but there is a future Kingdom that will contain only good seed and only wheat.

So we can also see clearly from this Parable that Jesus Himself believes in a Heaven and a Hell. There will most assuredly be a Judgement Day, and Jesus Himself will determine who goes where. We are not part of this final decision, and neither should we speculate about who's going to "make it" to Heaven and who is not. So, for those who believe that everyone is going to Heaven, Jesus speaks a clear "no" to them.

Secondly, not only will we not be involved in the decision, we should not be concerned about it. The tares, the weeds, are to be left in the field until Jesus determines what is to be done with them. Even then we are not involved in the disposition of the people, whether good or bad, for the angels will do Christ's bidding at the end times, on that great Judgement day. So, for all those who think this world is unjust, that they have been wronged in some way, there will be justice on the final day of Judgment, and, Alleluia! We will not be in charge of, or even be involved in, that judgement. The explanation of the parable continues in verse 40,

40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus, compassionate Jesus, who died for our sins, will be in charge. He will separate the wheat from the weeds, and He will have the angels burn the weeds in the fires of Hell. I don't know about you, but I am thrilled that I am not involved in this. It is enough for me to know that there will be justice, and secondly that I am protected from this horrible end by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Finally, this whole scene ends on a note of glory for those who love and obey Jesus Christ. In verse 43, Jesus says,

43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

We who know Jesus Christ and have sacrificed our lives for Him will "shine like the sun" in the New Heavens and the New Earth, in the Kingdom of Heaven to come. We will

glow with the love and exuberance of the Holy Spirit. We will be supremely happy and fulfilled. We will feast at the Heavenly Banquet with Jesus Christ and with all those who have gone before us and loved the Lord. As the prophet Isaiah foretold some 700 years before Christ (25:6-9),

**6** On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

**7** And he will swallow up on this mountain  
the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread over all nations.

**8** He will swallow up death forever;  
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,  
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken.

**9** It will be said on that day,  
“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.  
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

*Amen.*

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