

Sermon for Proper 11A  
Sunday, July 23, 2017  
“Wheat among Weeds”

Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus must have been a long-winded preacher, because for the third week in a row, he is still speaking in parables about seeds, weeds, and fields. How many ways can Jesus talk about life in terms of farming techniques? It may seem like he keeps repeating himself, like he is giving the same examples over and over again, but if we really listen, which is exactly what Jesus has told us to do, “Anyone who has ears, listen!”, if we really really hear what Jesus has to say, we will realize that each parable about weeds, seeds, sowers, and fields tells us something a little different. Each parable is a commentary on daily life.

Who here has any experience with gardening? I try my hand at it every year. Some years I get good crops, some years I get not so good crops. Some of you may have lots of room for your garden, so you can plant lots of different things. I am limited to a few pots that fit on and around the porch of the Rectory, so I don't plant as many different things that I'd like. But even in my little pots of tomatoes, basil, peppers, and such, every year there's something that starts growing in the pot that I did not plant. There's always something unexpected that pushes through the soil. I'm not an expert in horticulture, so I can't always identify what's coming up, so I let it grow. Sometimes it turns out to be another basil plant, because I forgot that I had thrown some random basil flowers in that pot last fall. Sometimes it's a pepper plant, because some dead peppers fell into the soil in winter when I cleaned out the pots because I was tired of looking at dead branches sitting in dry soil. Those things can be transplanted so they can thrive. And sometimes that unexpected plant turns out to be a dandelion, a weed, a useless plant for my purposes, but a hearty one that will take over if I let it. No matter what kind of soil you plant in, whether rocky, sandy, fertile, or not, whether it's in a huge garden or a pot on a porch the one thing we can be sure of is that something we hadn't planted will grow in it. Then it's up to us to decide whether it's a good plant or a weed. Often we can't tell, but if we pull it up too soon, we might be destroying something good. Sometimes we have

to let the weeds grow next to the good seeds until they declare what they are, and then we can deal with them appropriately.

That's exactly what today's gospel is about. Today's message from our Lord and Savior is that weeds will always grow in the same soil next to the good crops. In fact Jesus knew about a type of weed called darnel that looks like wheat until it matures, and then it can be properly identified. You can't tell the difference until the crops grow to a certain point, and that's when you can separate them and get rid of the weeds.

The meaning of this parable on life is that good and evil coexist side-by-side. That's a hard reality to accept, but it's the truth. Good and evil coexist side-by-side and there is nothing we can do about it. Good and evil coexist side-by-side and we often can't tell the difference. Sometimes things that we think are good for us turn out to be not so good. Sometimes the thing we rejected or the person we let out of our lives or the choice that we didn't take was the one that would have put us in a different place than where we are right now. We can't always tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds until the plants mature. We don't know how the choices we make in life will really turn out at the time we make them. We can speculate. We can make a logical, well-researched and thought out decision, but we won't know how it turns out until it actually does. And often it's not anything like what we had anticipated.

The other hard reality is that what's good for one person or group of people may not be so good for someone else. I firmly believe that everyone should be guaranteed health care, and that my tax dollars should go to support all of us having good, inexpensive if not free, health care. But although I've also never owned a business, I manage one, and the cost of having to provide health care to multiple employees can sometimes be prohibitive and eat into the profits which in turn reduces quality of the product or forces business to downsize which reduces the number of consumers in the world. The fight over whether Obamacare should stay or go is not as cut-and-dry as we would like to make it. Whatever happens, someone's going to benefit, and someone else is going to feel a pinch. Hopefully it won't be you and I feeling it! In every political revolution there is a group of people feeling in some way oppressed by the ruling government and they rise up to stand up for their rights. They often win and gain political power, legitimacy, and the respect they asked

for, but inevitably, even the revolutionaries become corrupt and want to hold on to power and do bad things to do so. And the next oppressed group comes along to save the day.

How many times have you wondered, “Why can’t God just take it all a way and make it better? Why can’t God simply get rid of the evil in the world?” It may not be so easy. What’s good today might be bad tomorrow. Several years ago when I was practicing medicine we were telling people to avoid eggs, butter, and sugar because they’re bad for you. Nowadays, doctors tell us that eggs are good for you and butter and sugar are better than the artificial substitutes. God can’t simply rid the world of evil things, because they always exist side-by-side and often shift roles from one day to the next. The next time any one of us want to feel self-righteous or judgemental about what’s good and what’s not, who’s right and who’s wrong, step back. There is a thin line between good and evil; there’s always more to an iceberg below the surface of the water than what you can actually see above. What’s good for some may be bad for others. We can only rely on God to help us distinguish the difference, to be able to recognize the weeds from the wheat.

As we heard Paul say in his letter to the Romans, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.” All we can do is hope. All we can do is ask God to guide us along the right path, to help us be wheat growing in fertile soil, and to give us strength, fortitude, and endurance when we come up against the weeds of life. Amen.

### Resources

Karoline Lewis, “Wheat and Tares and Other Truths about the Kingdom of Heaven” in *The Working Preacher*, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3285>.