

**Matthew 13:24-30, 26-43**

He put before them 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 **Getting in the Weeds**

As some of you may know, I have worked for a number of White Lick's congregation over the past few years, mainly working outside. This includes pulling weeds, tending to gardens, and caring for lawns. Now, let it be known that just because I've been hired to do this a lot, does not mean that I'm anything close to an expert. When I say I've been asked to come over and work, I can say without a doubt that I've never been chosen because of my vast knowledge of gardening, as I will soon demonstrate. My most frequent employer, to this day, happens to be Alice McDowell, who I'm sure most of you know. I haven't done work for her since going to college, but I know she has moved on to hiring someone new, someone I also am aware knows much more than I do, which is great to know. In the past, whenever she hired me, it usually revolved around pulling weeds and planting new flowers in her garden. Each and every time after I was given my task for the day, she'd go off, and I'd be left with nothing but my tools, her well kept garden, and my limited gardening know-how. Definitely an exciting combination, to say the least. Every so often, she would come out and check up on me. Towards the end of one session, I told Alice I was done and she went to check on my work. I'm sure she regretted it immediately. To make a long story short, she noticed that I had uprooted an entire section of plants I had installed in a previous session, mistaking them for weeds, and then had completely ignored a patch of weeds growing nearby, mistaking them for flowers. So not only did I have to redeem myself by removing the weed infestation I had completely ignored, I also had to piece together and attempt to reinstall the section of plant I had torn out of the ground, as it was clinging to dear life. Looking back on it, it's actually shocking she had me come back again after that.

But in my defense, I'd think we can all agree, whether it is farming or gardening, starting from a little seed and trying to grow an ideal plant is challenging, whether you're a newcomer or a seasoned veteran. And at least for me, one of the hardest parts is identifying what things are good, and what things are bad. The workers in this parable from Matthew would certainly fall under the category of seasoned veteran. They are also faced with the challenge of having to deal with pesky weeds. They come up with a plan that sounds very reasonable: remove the weeds before they have a chance to grow and choke out the wheat growing nearby. Unfortunately, the task isn't as simple as it sounds. These specific weeds are referred to in other translations as tares, a type of weed that happens to look almost identical to wheat stalk when they grow next to each other, making it nearly impossible to know which one is to be kept and which one is to be removed. This challenge of being unable to see the difference between good and bad is not just something evident in the world of gardening. When it comes to the decisions that we have to make in our lives, most of the time, they don't fall neatly into categories of good and bad. Maybe it is being offered a big promotion, which would certainly help support the ones living at home, but asks of more time at work and less time spent with those same loved ones. It might be the choice between saving up for that well deserved vacation to reward yourself for all your hard work, or giving money to a local charity after a natural disaster strikes. Not to mention, day to day life is hectic. On the one hand, we have responsibilities we have to follow through with, whether it's going to work, going to school, or rushing off to the many activities and commitments scheduled throughout the week. However, it is easy to turn these responsibilities into distractions. Rarely is it ever by choice, but if we aren't intentional

with our time and efforts, they soon become like weeds popping up in our lives, choking out the garden of our faith. I find it interesting that in a world where we so frequently see the back and forth narrative of right vs. wrong, whether it's in books, movies, or TV, how rare it is that in real life, that narrative seems obvious. Going back to the case of wheat and tares, the differences between the two only become apparent once the harvest season begins and by that point, the tares have already ravaged much of the wheat. The seeds that the enemy sows in our life, the daily distractions, the back and forth decisions, however subtle and unassuming they may seem on the surface, can still yield results that have the power to choke out our faith. With all of this in mind, then, it makes much more sense why the master says not to remove the weeds from the field. He knows that while the workers are experienced and used to identifying weeds and removing them, the likelihood still exists that they will uproot wheat along with the weeds. He doesn't want them to make a hasty decision, to judge the crop before seeing what it bears. This master, in many ways, reminds me of the shepherd from the Parable of the Lost Sheep, who searched after one sheep despite having 99 of his sheep protected and safe. It paints a picture of a Savior who cannot stand to lose anyone to sin and death, holding no favorites. Not only that, He reserves judgment, and gives freedom to make a choice and see what comes as a result. Allowing the tares to grow along with the wheat, once the harvest rolls around, it will then be known what is to be kept and what is to be gotten rid of. Doing all of this, letting the weeds grow, when it would be just as easy to get rid of them, takes a level of patience and thoughtfulness that so rarely is seen. We might even consider it crazy. For us, making a snap judgment, having an opinion on everything, these are what we do all the time. Basing our beliefs on feelings, but not facts; already knowing what side of the argument we are on before we even know both sides; putting up walls between us and those who might disagree. We are shown here that taking a more patient approach doesn't mean we are lazy or complacent, but that we are taking an opportunity to rationally think through a situation. Even though some of the tares may kill off some of the wheat, the key is that none of the wheat was mistaken for a weed, and vice versa. Finally, on the day of the harvest, the weeds were collected up together and burned, while the wheat was gathered into the master's barn. When Jesus is asked by the disciples later to interpret this part, Jesus gives a very strong description, throwing evildoers and causes of sin in the fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This sounds strange when compared to a God that was previously described as patient, loving and thoughtful. But rather than being scary and intimidating, this is to be reassuring. Although we live in a world where evil always seems to linger and destroys whatever is good, where even we as believers have the ability to make terrible decisions, God has a plan to eventually rid the world of all the evil, and destroy what separates us from the kingdom. How wonderful it is to know that God is wise and in control, and how wonderful it is to know that by holding strong in our faith, we will always have Him on our side. Thanks be to God.