

Sermon: Pentecost 8A July 19, 2026

Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Text: Matt. 13:24-30, 46-53

Today's parable of the wheat and the weeds was first heard many centuries ago, but what it **speaks** to – the presence of sin and evil, the purposes of God, and the life of believers – seems all **too** relevant today, when the language of good vs. evil is strewn heavily throughout everyday conversations, political pronouncements, and religious debates. Everywhere we find lines being drawn, and people looking to wipe out evil...and those they believe are committing or encouraging it. What a surprise then to hear the householder's counsel to his servants in today's parable! When the servants come to him agitated and upset upon discovering weeds coming up right alongside the wheat, he turns **down** their earnest offer to pull up the weeds immediately.

It's not that the householder doesn't see the weeds or know where they came from. After all, **he's** the one who says, "An enemy did this." He **also** sees what his overzealous servants **cannot**: that weeds and wheat aren't always so easy to tell apart, especially when the weed is darnel, a grass whose long, slender bristles make it look very much like wheat. If the servants were to try to extract the weeds, they'd pull up wheat and leave weeds behind. So the householder commands the servants to let the weeds **and** wheat grow together until the harvest, when it will be absolutely clear what to gather in and what to discard. He **also** tells them it will be somebody **else's** work, not theirs...

which is all very well in a parable, but **more** disturbing when we think about what's **really** being talked about...God's kingdom and the forces that seek to prevent its growth, to disrupt and destroy it. It makes us

wonder: Doesn't Jesus get it? Doesn't God care? This is **serious**. Doesn't God understand something must be done? The answer is: **Of course** God cares and Jesus gets it! But God takes a **different** approach to the reality of evil in the world, an approach that involves patience, purpose, and hope. And **then** Jesus calls **us** to do the same.

Jesus says this knowing that even his most **fervent** disciples will resist this approach, will want to hurry things along and engage in their **own** frenzied program of early weed eradication. But Jesus says, Don't! To follow **that** approach is not a mark of faith, but instead evidence that we have our doubts about God's ability to bring in the harvest. It **also** reveals our irritation and discomfort at discovering that God prefers to govern with great forbearance and to judge with mildness, to quote the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon...even though we **ourselves** are the blessed beneficiaries of that mercy and forbearance.

Of course, this wouldn't be the **only** example of such resistance to God's approach. **All** the gospels are **filled** with stories of people who didn't get what God was doing in Jesus, who worried Jesus wasn't using the right strategy. When Jesus was arrested and put to death, his disciples and enemies **alike** believed that the powers of death had won, that the weeds of destruction and chaos would now overrun the field of the world and choke the life right out of us. Yet, **to the end**, even on the **cross**, Jesus kept faith with the God of this parable, a God of wisdom and forbearance, who does **not** attack or condemn, who simply, steadfastly continues to keep his word and fulfill his promises. The powers that be saw **Jesus** as the weed in **their** field and chose to tear him out of life. But when God raised Jesus from the dead as the **first fruits** of God's harvest, Jesus became the guarantee that **we** shall enjoy

the **same** harvest and that **nothing** will ever be able to choke off our life with God or prevent God's harvest in the fullness of time.

But what shall we do in the **meantime**? Are we supposed to sit idly by while evil rears its ugly head, while divisions and injustices arise? Are we simply to grit our teeth and bear it? No, that's **not** what Jesus is saying. Think back, if you will, to the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus proposed an alternative to our presumptuous and misguided early weed eradication program, in which we identify evil with particular groups of people and seek to eliminate them, if not from life, then from our communities and our churches or at least from our sight. Jesus has come to enlist us in **his** holy and wholly different campaign: Resist evil with good; meet hatred with love; let the wheat of mercy and generosity show forth in all that you say and do. Never stop trusting God's purpose and power, and wait...wait with patience and hope even and **especially** when it doesn't look as though God is winning.

That's why in this parable and **throughout** Matthew's gospel, Jesus pleads with us to give up trying to cut out all the weeds so we can show **ourselves** to be the perfect wheat. Jesus implores us to give up working **against** the very grace we proclaim. For the truth is: we **ourselves** are **both** wheat and weeds, at once saints and sinners, as Luther put it, and it is grace indeed that God doesn't cast **us** away but rather devotes God's self to saving us.

You see, at its heart, this parable is about patience, the patience God has and the patience we need, because until Jesus comes again, we will **continue** to live in a world so much **less** than ideal. And all our frenzied attempts to label, sort, and discard **now** will **not** speed the day God has appointed for the great gathering-in; we can't rush the harvest and put it on a timetable we'd prefer. Instead, God gives us time to exercise

God's own mercy and patience and to be the very best wheat we can be, to be willing to see and speak with and about those we distrust or fear or oppose as fellow human beings, as much the target of God's love and grace as we are. If we can persevere in being more wheat than weeds, in speaking and acting with God's own mercy, perhaps we can be part of the solution instead of enlarging the problem. Perhaps we can encourage inviting a table of genuine dialogue, not polemics about diverse approaches to problems, rather than refusing to sit at the table with "those" people. There's a way in which we all just want the big troubles of our time go away and the people we think **caused** them to go away, too. Yet that is not God's way, not Jesus' way. God persists in inserting mercy and grace into the most intractable and frightening situations.

But tucked into the parable is another clue that God wants us to consider this approach: when the householder tells the servants to "let" things be, to let the weeds and wheat continue to grow together, he uses the same Greek word used in the Lord's Prayer and elsewhere to say "forgiveness." This word encourages us to negotiate the territory **between** destructive anger and utter despair, **neither** of which is our calling as Christians. This word gives us room to let hope in God's promises rule our hearts and minds and makes us consider the possibility of conversion, so that we don't feel driven to make an end of things...or of **people** right now...which, you'll remember, is **not our job**, according to Jesus.

That reminds me of the witness Deborah Nyakabirika made after her son was killed in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Months after his death, a young man came to visit her. He said, "I killed your son. Take me to the authorities and let them deal with me as they will." But Deborah

answered, "You are no longer an animal but a man taking responsibility for your actions. I do not want to add death to death. But I want you to restore justice by replacing the son you killed. I am asking you to become my son. And when you visit me, I will care for you. This is the Gospel work Pastor John Rutsindintwarane and the Lutheran Church of Rwanda have taken up, building a church where perpetrators and survivors of genocide worship together in the same pew, learn the power of forgiveness, and work **together** for the needs of their communities.

Of course, to live this way, even in **small** ways, is difficult...and sometimes frustrating...at times, even **maddening**, because we human beings are chronically impatient with our brothers and sister and with God. We find it difficult to wait for the future or to stop and see signs of the future sprouting amid the present.

But there is **Good News** today. God sees the wheat and the weeds of us and doesn't turn away. God forgives our presumptions, doubt, impatience, and need to be "right." God doesn't cast us away, but instead creates in us **new** hearts, puts a **new** spirit within us, and nourishes this new life with the very body and blood of Jesus who lived and died and rose again for the very mixed and mixed up field of this world. Then, graced by God, we **will be able to wait** with hope, with faith active in love, until the day when **all** of us will be surprised to see just whom God has gathered in the holy harvest barn. And that's the way it is – thanks be to God! Amen.