

Sermon preached at OCC, 23 July 2023

*O God, our guide, set your path clearly before us and lead us to follow you willingly for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### ***The seed and the weeds***

In *Stories of Intent – A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, American theologian and author Klyne Snodgrass puts that stories are one of the few places that allow us to see reality there, to a degree, we cannot do in real life; we can discern motives, keep score, know who won, and what success and failure look like.<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass describes parables as “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” He seems to say how parables lead us to unknown territory that will make us think and be transformed accordingly. As the word parable – *parabole* in Greek means “throwing aside” indicates, it makes people continually think it over. It is more intriguing when Jesus used them a lot to teach the kingdom of heaven while no one (including the disciples) seemed to grasp its meaning entirely.

For this reason, parables are elusive too. It reminds us of Isaiah 6:9, in which God says to Isaiah, “Go and say to this people: “Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.” Why God made things so hard to understand and incomprehensible? This question makes us return to the beginning of our conversation again! Last week, the parable in the lectionary reading was about the sower; today, the parable of the weeds among the wheat. The good seed and the weeds grow in the same field in this parable. We’ll explore it through the two different sowers, the good seed and weeds, and finally, the harvest through which we will glimpse the kingdom of heaven.

### ***The two sowers***

In this parable, we encounter two sowers. The one who sows the good seed is the owner of the field. He seems wealthy as he has a field and servants too. Interestingly, the seed is planted by the owner, not the servants. The other, the enemy, comes at night to sow weeds. Even though it’s night time, he also works thoroughly. From the beginning, it tells us that the kingdom must contend with evil and that God permits evil and good to co-exist until the end.<sup>2</sup> When the servants notice the presence of weeds in the field, they first doubt the seed quality and, next,

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<sup>1</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne, (2008), Eerdmans

<sup>2</sup> Gardner, Richard B., *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1990), 214.

understand the act of the enemy. Under the guidance of the householder, the weeds are allowed to grow alongside the wheat until the end.

But somehow, some of us are troubled by the dualism of this reading. It seems to tell us that there are two groups of people in the world – the good seed and the weeds- whose destinies are fixed from the beginning. Especially in verse 13:41, Jesus says that at the end of the age, the angels will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin (*skandala*) and all evildoers and throw them into the furnace of fire. Although fearsome words they are, hearing this makes us feel relieved because we don't have to remove the weeds, but God! Here we'd like to focus on the word *skandala*, which is the origin of the word – scandal, used in various scripture contexts. For example, when Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”<sup>3</sup> Again, when Jesus warns those who put a stumbling block (*skandalon*) before any of the little ones, they deserve to have a millstone put around their neck and be drowned in the sea.<sup>4</sup> As Jesus' disciples, Peter may belong to the good seed, may he not? These examples, show that sin, or stumbling block is based on certain actions against God's kingdom rather than physical substance. We don't know why God allowed evil in the world, but we are instructed to forgive them first, like the householder did to the weeds.

### ***The weeds***

In the kingdom of heaven, the weeds can grow with the good seed side by side. There seems to be no such border separating the good seed from the weeds. It is a borderless kingdom where the citizens might not immediately appear. The word for weeds Matthew uses is darnel (*zizania*), a weed that resembles wheat and is commonly present in Israel. The difference between darnel and natural wheat is only when the plants mature, and the ears appear. The ears of the natural wheat are heavy and will droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight. Seeing weeds sprouting among the wheat, the servants become perplexed and ask the householder if the seed is good. But learning that an enemy is responsible for the weeds, they want to pull them up to maintain a pure crop. To this, the householder says that any attempt to root out the weeds will only do more damage to the crop, which also resonates with the life of the church and its mission. That is, when it comes to different opinions, interpretations of

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:23

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 18:6-7

scriptures, liturgical practice or stand on a particular issue, we may learn from the parable of the weeds by not judging those who are different from us, but allowing them room to grow, contending side by side which also enables us to identify our vulnerability and weaknesses only to be strengthened later through the work of the Spirit.

### ***The harvest***

The harvest is undoubtedly a time to divide the wheat and the weeds. In reality, dividing the world neatly into the good seed (the righteous) and the weeds (evildoers) is not easy. Both the Gospel and our experience tell us that such categories are fluid, co-existent, and difficult to discern. Most of us, the church-goers, comprise both plant types and are not 'surely' one or the other. In Matthew 12:50, Jesus declared his family to comprise those who do "the will of my Father in heaven," a descriptor that might embrace a wide and surprising variety of people. In addition, the sower/the owner of the field in the parable seems to think that the weeds won't threaten the wheat as the two are capable of growing together. The threat, however, comes from how we *react* to the weeds. The danger is not being in the presence of sin but trying to root out all the sins we see. For the church, finding the strength to resist evil while not taking matters into our own hands whenever we see it is what we learn from the parable of the weeds. In verse 30, the master tells the servant just to "let" (*aphiemi-ἀφίημι*) things be; the Greek word is the same word in the Lord's Prayer for 'forgiveness.'

The fate of the weeds is left in the hands of the ultimate judge. It's not the job of the servants or making judgments about what is and isn't actual wheat. Their job is to serve the farmer as he spreads the legitimate seed. In our story time, we heard about a girl named Luisa. She has been bullied by another girl Sam. The question was if we could identify the good seed and the weeds in the story. The easy answer may be that Luisa is a good seed, while Sam - as a bully - the weeds. But if we read it through the biblical lens, we find both - the seed and the weeds - in Luisa. It's because she begins to accept whatever Sam tells her mockingly as her reality. She doesn't see herself truthfully as before. But overcoming the bullying with Mum's help has helped her grow and regain her identity. Now she loves herself as she is. Likewise, living in the hope of Christ is like the good seed in the field, which has to compete with the weeds. The weeds may attack the seed in different ways that may hinder the seed from growing. Yet the seed also learns how to endure and to remain persistent by re-learning the hope for harvest continually. The strength is the by-product of the growth. The weeds are actually helping the seed grow strong! In the end, the great harvest is coming in God's time, as the Son of man who

on earth forgave sins freely, who suffered at the hands of betrayers, confirms that God's gracious promises can be trusted. In this way, we will glimpse the kingdom of heaven, where things are done according to the love of God. Amen!