

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost - A - Proper 11 (2026)

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalms 139: 1-11, 22-23

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I must admit, since moving from Spokane to our condominium development in Burlington, weeds have been much less of an irritant. For whatever reason, weeds are simply not a part of the landscape throughout our development, an exceedingly pleasant side benefit of our new residence. This has not always been the case, as I was responsible for the miserable chore of weeding while tending the yard at my childhood home and at the homes Julie and I have owned before relocating to Burlington. Weeds were a never-ending annoyance, marring an otherwise lovely-looking yard by their unsightly presence among the bushes and blooming plants. By the way, where do those weeds come from, anyway? I didn't plant them. Just asking.

In today's Gospel reading, Matthew recounts Jesus' teaching through the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Tares). Not only does Jesus offer insight into the coexistence of wheat and weeds, but he also continues with parables that illustrate how the kingdom of heaven operates by comparing mustard seeds with expansive bushes and the significant impact of small traces of leaven on large volumes of flour. Matthew concludes this section with Jesus explaining the parable of the wheat and weeds to his disciples, with that ever-sobering admonition from Jesus, “He who has ears, let him hear.”

By way of a reminder, the operating definition of a parable is ‘a story using common, everyday objects and activities to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.’ Jesus uses them because the crowds could understand the illustration even if they struggled with the spiritual implications. They were a staple of Jesus’ teaching methods in the gospels and addressed complex or abstract theological ideas such as forgiveness, grace, and the burgeoning ‘kingdom of heaven.’ In today’s lesson of wheat and weeds, Jesus uses the activity of farming and sowing to illustrate the reality of evil in the world and ultimately of God’s sovereign nature in dealing with it. Let’s start there.

So, Jesus tells the crowds that, “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.” As it turns out, this sabotaging of someone’s field using the darnel seed was not unheard of; in fact, the Romans had a law against it. The field workers didn’t notice what had happened until the wheat (and weeds) began to sprout. These workers responded as I think I would have: they asked the landowner if they should go and pluck the weeds out of the field, to which the landowner responded, “No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with it. 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.’”

We obviously have a story about good seed (wheat) and bad seed (darnel) coexisting in a field. We hear of the evil intent to sabotage the field and the field worker’s inquiry about whether they should do some remedial weeding. We hear of the landowner’s desire to wait and let both plants grow, because uprooting the bad could cause damage to the good, and that ultimately, both plants will end up where they belong: the good wheat in the barn and the bad weeds in the furnace of fire. But now we need to apply the ‘spiritual truth’ to which the story points, which makes it a parable.

Assuming we agree on the following: The sower of good seed is Jesus; the field represents the world; the good seed stands for the children of the kingdom; the weeds represent the children of the evil one, the devil; and the harvest points to the end of the age, where the reapers (angels) will separate the righteous from the wicked, the spiritual implications become more clear.

God, in his wisdom, allows for good and evil to coexist in the world. We see, and sometimes experience this, on a regular basis. On one hand, the difference between the two can be stark and unambiguous. Abuse of any kind against anyone, especially against the most vulnerable among us, is unambiguously evil. The taking advantage of someone just 'because one can' is not just mean and dehumanizing; it runs contrary to everything taught in Scripture and the natural laws of human nature where we are all created equal. Evil exists in the world because God allows evil; not because he condones it, but because God gives us the freedom to choose how we want to live. Some choices, as Paul writes in his letter to the Romans we just heard, lead to death, while others lead to life. Evil exists because some choose to follow the ways of spiritual darkness, and we are challenged to stand firm against such evil because we are children of the light, God's light. We share this temporary world with evil, and the parable tells us that God not only knows we do so, but that ultimately all will be made right and that judgment, while delayed, will not be denied.

In light of this reality, we are charged to be wise. We are to discern with patience and the leading of the Spirit that which is truly 'wheat' and 'weed.' Sometimes, like the early sprouting of the wheat that was mixed with the darnel seed, the difference might be indistinguishable. Over time, though, it became apparent. We must be mindful against making hasty judgments, for we run the risk of harming that which is actually 'good.'

While I may be misapplying the parable in that the wheat and the darnel seed are NOT the same and one can't change into the other, I want to apply this teaching of discernment and patience in how we judge other human beings. It is through patience that a life that once appeared lost and

destined for death is renewed and flourishes because of the nurture and care of God and the good soil in which it lives. The truth is, Heaven can wait. While it won't be forever, it is not up to us to decide. The reapers in the parable will arrive soon enough, and it's their responsibility to do the separating, not ours.

While we are not called to serve as reapers, we are called to live as children of God. We are to stand firm against the evil in this world, sometimes taking an active role, always through prayer. We are called to speak out against evil when we see it and not to be enticed by it. Honestly, what I've observed over the past several years is not so much the calling out of 'evil' or the actions associated with it, as the calling out of human beings deemed evil. Is there some nuance in this statement? Of course, there is. However, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul teaches that this fight against evil is not against flesh and blood, "but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

And finally, my friends, a good dose of humility, patience, and trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God will allow us not only to stand firm in the face of evil, but also to come to grips with God's divine plan for all of creation. Good will be vindicated. Evil and death have already been destroyed, while the fullness of such is yet to come. For now, let's tend our own gardens and not worry about someone else's. I know I've got my own weeds to keep me busy.