

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.'"

³⁶Then 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." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 2017

This week we have another farming parable, one the people of Jesus' day would be able to relate to.

Jesus tries to give his followers some sense of what the kingdom of heaven is like by comparing it to the situation in this story.

Given that story it may seem a bit of a stretch to us.

This week's parable would seem to be about the sowers, one of them good and the other evil.

We have one who has planted good seed in his fields to grow wheat, and another has come along behind him and planted weeds,

these weeds will look just like wheat until they are fully mature.

The similarity of the two plants make this situation all the more difficult and the slaves who think they know best want to go out and pull the weeds out of the field.

The difficulty is that this particular weed in our story, called bearded darnel,

has a root system that will entangle the roots of the wheat and if pulled out will bring the wheat with it,

destroying the possibility for a harvest.

Jesus, interpreting this parable for the disciples who don't understand says,

- The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,
- The field is the world.

- The good seed are the children of the kingdom
- The weeds are the children of the evil one, and
 - the enemy is the one who sowed them and he is the devil.
- The harvest is the end of the age.
- The reapers are angels.

Now, one common way to understand parables and make them relevant is for the reader to determine which of the characters in the story they identify with;

which one is you.

Are you the good or bad seed?

These are your only two choices in this parable according to Jesus' interpretation.

At that point you may discern how your life measures up to God's expectations or assess your relationship with Jesus and others in light of the parable.

But there is another character you may want to give some consideration to who is not so prominent and is easily overlooked;

the slaves who are not included in Jesus' interpretation.

The slaves in the story came to the landowner after finding that the bad seed had sprouted with the good and asked if they were to go pull the weeds out.

Strangely enough they were told to let the bad and good grow together until the harvest when you could distinguish one from the other,

and then the reapers would collect the weeds and burn them and harvest the wheat.

While the slaves intentions were good, they had presumed first to know what needed to be done,

and second that they were the ones to do the job of figuring out which were the product of the good seed and which were the product of the bad,

which was good and which was evil.

This is one of the relevant points for us today.

You see, there are plenty of people, to include each of us from time to time, who are ready and willing to make judgments about who is in and who is out,

who is acceptable and who is not, friend or enemy, pure or evil.

We see this going on everywhere.

We see and hear it in the voices of the radical Islamist community who is determined to wipe out western culture and Christianity,

and in our response to that.

We see and hear it in the battles being waged in the disagreements about our immigration policy and who should be let in and who should be kept out,

and I am not making a political statement here, this issue is too complex to be addressed in one statement like this one.

I do want us to remember the limitations of our abilities to judge good and evil.

Hard as it is to believe we also witness this same struggle going on in the church. Who is allowed in and who isn't;

who should be here and who shouldn't.

There are a number of anecdotal stories you have heard before about the homeless man who shows up at the church on Sunday morning, dressed in rags, unshaven, smelling different from anyone else, maybe a little strange in behavior.

How does the community in that church respond?

Is he allowed in or shown the way out?

Of course there is division in many congregations about even this matter

and it is probable that someone is going to get demonized over their opinion,

although I am sure none of that would happen here.

You may be able to cite examples of some congregations being torn apart by a small group of people trying to weed out the ones they have identified as evil or just unacceptably different.

They may even believe they are well intended and believe they are doing God's work.

There often is a felt need or desire to purify the world you live in, or the church you worship in,

But the point Jesus is making is that it is God's work to do the sorting and judging, not ours.

As you review the stories of Jesus you remember that He did not weed out Judas for betraying Him, or Peter for denying Him,

or the rest of the disciples for running away on the night He was arrested.

They were not producing the fruit He expected of them but He didn't weed them out of the fellowship of his followers.

Jesus did not weed out the paralytic, the leper, tax collector or prostitute but included them with those who are loved, healed and forgiven by God.

Our world is full of ambiguity

One pastor said that in a world colored as ours is by ambiguity, the only absolute is to be found in the absolutism.

Powerful words.

Powerful words that bring us back to the thought I had at the beginning of this sermon.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a mixed up place where good and bad, holy and evil co-exist,

where they live together as neighbors, co-workers, classmates at school, among friends, and yes in the same church;

Now, if this is what the kingdom of heaven is like, what do we have to look forward to?

Can this be as good as it gets?

This question comes out of a limited perspective on what the kingdom of heaven is.

First let me say that the kingdom of heaven language in the NT is interchangeable with "kingdom of God."

It helps us visualize the breadth of the divine power behind God's kingdom rather than the power itself.

Another limiting perception is that the kingdom of heaven is only the place you go after you die, as Jesus has promised.

We need to understand much more about this kingdom of heaven in order to have a better grasp on what Jesus is talking about in this parable.

Jesus was not a part of the power structure or a product of the Jewish school of wisdom,

but a child of the folk Judaism, a local rabbi who conceived of God's activity in terms of the social world he saw around him.

He saw God active in that world, and his vision, yes, gave him an assurance of the future filled with hope,

but also an assurance of God's presence and rule in the daily life of the people

which brings the kingdom of heaven.

For Jesus the kingdom was in the seed cultivated and in the growing, and awaited an all-embracing culmination.

For Jesus the kingdom of heaven, God's kingdom, was a palpable force that expelled demons, healed, cleansed lepers, forgave sins and raised the dead,

all while announcing itself as the presence, power and activity of God in this world.

The only absolute was to be found in the absolute.

These words supply one reason why you come here and others should come;

to join together to acknowledge that while life is really hard sometimes, and the choices in front of you are not always clear or easy,

while you may need the evil expelled from some part of your life, or to be

healed, cleansed, forgiven or given new life,

you can still experience the kingdom of heaven in the presence of God in your life,

in coming here, in hearing those words of absolution.

In the between times while you are out there dealing with the differences, good and evil, the ambiguity, the colors of this world,

you have the support of the rest of this community that loves and accepts you,

and you know you can return here any time to be in the presence of God,

experience the kingdom of heaven once again.