

## **Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist**

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared.

“The servants of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Master, didn’t you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?’

“‘An enemy has done this,’ he answered.

“The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather them?’

“But the landowner said, ‘No, because if you gather the weeds, you’ll pull up the wheat along with them. Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvesttime I’ll say to the harvesters, “First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.”’”

Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

Jesus replied, “The one who plants the good seed is the Human One. The field is the world. And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom. But the weeds are the followers of the evil one. The enemy who planted them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the present age. The harvesters are the angels. Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire, so it will be at the end of the present age. The Human One will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin. He will throw them into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Those who have ears should hear.”

## 1. Two Wolves

Mr. Rogers once said: “Have you ever noticed that the very same people who are bad sometimes are the very same people who are good sometimes?” It reminds me of a story called, “Two Wolves.”

An old Cherokee once told his grandson about a fight that was going on inside of him. He said it was between two wolves. One was evil: anger, envy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, gossip, resentment, and false pride. The other was good: joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf do you think will win?” The old Cherokee replied, “The one I feed.”

## 2. The Complex Human

If you look at a strand of DNA, you will notice what scientists call a “double helix,” two strands winding around each other with connectors in between that contain the make-up of each biological person.

If Jesus were a biologist today, that’s how He might describe the human spirit. His example of the human spirit explained in Matthew is a complex entanglement of roots—namely two plants growing side by side whose roots are entwined together. They are rooted together so much that to pull out one would also destroy the other. Only at harvest time can they be separated and gathered. As long as they are living and growing, both must remain intact.

Often we read this scripture as though Jesus were simply talking about different kinds of people. When you read closely, it appears more than He is describing two “natures” within one human being. Paul says something very similar in Romans 7 as he describes the desire to do good inside yet also the

sin that is at war against it within his body. Jesus recognizes that every human has the propensity to do both good and evil, to be both “wheat” — nourishment and seed of God—for the world and “weed” — bitterness and death—in the world.

The tricky part is, they both not only can exist and grow together at the root of our personality but sometimes the two can be unrecognizable. Sometimes it's hard to see which one is which, especially in a complex world and in complicated situations.

That's why only God, according to Jesus, has the ability to judge a good plant from a weed in the final harvest.

Jesus calls us, instills in us His righteousness and rest, when we agree to follow Him. And yet sin's roots still lie deep within our hearts and can easily lead us astray, especially when things get complicated in our world and we can't tell the difference between sin and good. Sometimes they are exceedingly hard to tell apart. In our world today, good can mask as evil. Evil can mask as good. Although we try our best with the help of God to discern which is which, we undoubtedly will make mistakes. So it is a humility that Jesus calls us to, a humility that allows us to recognize the inability at times of our judgments to be clear, a humility that encourages us to be cautious with the sentences we make, lest the sin in us begin to thrive.

Why? Because the human soul is an entwined spirit.

### **3. Loss of Hope**

It may not seem like it, but, in this week's parable, Jesus speaks directly and comfortingly to humanity's loss of hope. The story would have been familiar to those listening. They knew about the weeds that, in the early stages of growth, were indistinguishable from the wheat. They knew the

frustration of enemies planting such weeds in good wheat fields. They knew the dangers of trying to remove the weeds—because the good could not easily be distinguished from the bad, and the roots would intertwine. Jesus explained that the parable was about the evil one who “plants” wicked people in the world, who cannot immediately be rooted out and judged because they are indistinguishable from the righteous. Only at the “end of the age” can God finally separate the wheat from the weeds and deal with them as they deserve.

Jesus’ hearers were tired that evil was rampant among them, seemingly allowed to continue without consequence or judgment. They may well have applied this parable to their Roan overlords, and the corrupt religious establishment. Almost every response to this situation was one of despair. From the Pharisees and Sadducees who cooperated to preserve their influence and wealth, to the Essenes who withdrew into their own separated community, to the tax collectors who actively collaborated with the oppressors, to the zealots who sought to overthrow Rome by force of arms—all held a basic doubt that God was at work in the world or that evil would finally face its judgment.

Jesus challenges this loss of hope: Don’t lose faith in the people around you. Those who appear as weeds may actually reflect God’s life, and those who appear as wheat may be anything but. It’s not up to you to rip out the weeds or decide who’s in and who’s out. You need not fear being “corrupted” should a “wheaty” looking weed slip past your notice.

Don’t lose faith in yourself. Those “weeds” you’re ashamed of may yet turn out to be seeds of life and the “wheat” you take pride in may be far less significant than you think. Don’t judge your own heart too quickly or severely.

Don't lose faith in God. God does intend for goodness and love to win. God does intend to deal with evil and bring the cosmos to wholeness. But God's timetable is driven by grace and compassion. Don't allow your loss of hope to cause you to adopt evil methods or attempt to enact God's judgment prematurely. Trust that God's reign is at work even if it doesn't seem so.

There is always hope, because what may look like a weed can very well have the life and goodness of wheat surging up unseen within it. Our task is not to judge—not ourselves or others or the world or God's work in it. Our task is simply to trust, to believe, and to hope.

#### **4. Sowing Fruit**

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said that we begin living only when we rise above our individual concerns to the broader concerns of humanity. How can true concern flourish without our realizing we're all in this mess together? Our roots are inexorably tangled; whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

Good guy-bad guy exclusiveness limits the possibilities of continual conversion, reconciliation, maturing in faith, and compassion. For example, let the weeds represent all that is within the human character that stifles solidarity with all of life on this fragile planet. Only working together, accepting our connectedness, can we survive.

I also have the responsibility to confront the weeds in my own being, my own heart. The burning of the weeds begins long before the final day. Sins, mistakes, flaws, all kinds of soul-debris fuel the continually smoldering fire. Once in a while some chunk of the psyche loosens and falls out of hiding, letting in the air and stirring up a new fire. My life work includes letting in the

light, the air, accepting the fire of purification, not for my own sake alone, but for the sake of the whole.

Acknowledging the interconnectedness of life in the life cycle of my genesis, my entangled growth amongst the weeds, my transfiguration, my fruit bearing, and my dying, let me sow peace, love, pardon, truth, faith, hope, light, joy.

Listen to the Peace Prayer of St. Francis:

Lord make me an instrument of your peace

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is error, truth;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.