

Sermon for July 19, 2023 – 7th Sunday after Pentecost*

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 (EHV)

Theme: What Should We Do About the Weeds?

- 1) Recognize their source.
- 2) Accept their presence.
- 3) Be sure of their destiny.

²⁴He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced heads of grain, the weeds also appeared. ²⁷The servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸He said to them, ‘An enemy did this.’ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?’ ²⁹‘No,’ he answered, ‘because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn.”’” ³⁶Then Jesus sent the people away and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” ³⁷He answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the Evil One. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Our world is hostile to Christianity. Even though we don't live in a country where governments or terror groups threaten us physically, we still feel the heat. The media often mocks our Biblical beliefs, and people call us intolerant for saying sin is sin. Our government has passed laws that could affect our freedom to worship and witness Christ the way he desires. Yes, when you look behind the façade of civility, it doesn't take long to realize that our Western society, by and large, has no use for Biblical Christianity.

Living a Christian life on this earth is hard. So, what should we do in response to all the pressure we feel from the world to give up our faith? Should we get politically active and establish some sort of Christian state to secure our safety? Should we take a page from radical Islam's playbook and try to rid the world of infidels? Absolutely not!

Then what would God have us do with the problem of unbelievers? With Jesus' parable of the weeds as our guide, let us listen to our Saviour's answer, under the theme: **What should we do with the weeds?** 1) *Recognize their source.* 2) *Accept their presence.* 3) *Be sure of their destiny.*

Part One: Recognize their source.

Jesus once said: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.*

As Jesus explains, the field is the world, and the man who sowed the good seed is the “Son of Man”; that is Jesus himself. *The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom:* believers like you and me scattered throughout the world, in whom the Holy Spirit awakened faith in Christ through the preaching of His Gospel. And your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins is not without effect. Your faith produces fruit - giving birth to a new attitude inside of you that loves God and wants to share his Gospel with others so they, too, might be saved.

Unfortunately, God’s enemy, the devil, wants to ruin Christ’s kingdom. To describe the seriousness of the devil’s effort, Jesus uses the picture of an enemy secretly sowing a type of weed on the man’s field that was far more serious than your average crabgrass or dandelions. You see, the word translated as “weed” seems to refer to a specific type of darnel that grows up looking exactly like rye until the kernels start to appear. To make matters worse, this type of darnel can contain a poisonous mould that can cause severe illness or death if consumed.

Jesus explains that the deadly weeds are the *sons of the Evil One*; that is to say, they represent all who refuse to believe in Christ and attempt to suppress the spread of the Gospel. Just as both ryegrass and bearded darnel look almost identical as they sprout, so also believers and unbelievers cannot be told apart by looking at them. They work at the same jobs, enjoy the same hobbies, root for the same teams, work hard for their communities, and love their country. They may look the same in all outward appearances, yet they are entirely different.

For example, take the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, who appeared to be the very picture of morality and righteousness. But Jesus knew the wickedness of their hearts, so he publicly told them: *You belong to your father, the Devil, and you want to do your father’s desires.*ⁱ And what great desire did the Pharisees share with the devil? It’s the identical desire the unbelieving world shares with the devil today: to keep people from believing in Jesus and, thereby, prevent them from having a restored relationship with God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: rejoice that God awakened faith in your hearts to repent and believe in Jesus for salvation. Because of His work, you are the good seed in which our LORD takes great joy. You are the LORD’s light on this earth – showing the way of salvation through your witness of the Gospel. Understand that all the hindrances we face to learn and share the Good News of Jesus are not merely harmless nuisances. No, they are weeds that the devil planted to ruin Jesus’ work.

Part Two: Accept their presence.

“But,” someone might ask, “if the LORD wants his Gospel to spread and kingdom to grow, why doesn’t he just get rid of those who try to suppress it?” That question is expressed in Jesus’ parable,

when ²⁷*the servants of the owner came and ... asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?'*

The servants reasoned that wheat could grow a lot easier and healthier if the weeds weren't around stealing nourishment and hindering their growth. But look at how emphatically the master answers them: ²⁹*'No,' he answered, 'because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn."'"*

The LORD cares for all his elect. He does not want a single one of them to be mistakenly destroyed with the wicked – something that could easily happen if their time on earth was shortened. This is why the master tells his servants to wait until the harvest when each person - just like the plants in the parable - will be revealed for who they truly are. On that day, some people you might have thought were “weeds” may turn out to be “wheat,” and some people you considered wheat may be revealed as hypocritical weeds.

Yes, when dealing with unbelievers on this earth, God does not want Christians to go on crusades to rid the world of infidels. That is what the devil wants his followers to do with Christians! No, when dealing with unbelievers, God wants us to remember Jesus' words and tolerate their presence. Do not try to hurt, harm, or remove them from the world; instead, reach out to them in all sincerity and love – praying for their conversion. Why? Because even a man who might seem like Christianity's worst enemy could become one of God's most fruitful servants. Consider the apostle Paul, who, before his conversion, was the worst kind of weed, only later to be revealed as one of the most fruitful Christian stalks this world has ever known.

Therefore, when it comes to life on this earth, God wants us to accept the fact that we will have to share this world with the wicked. Instead of responding to their persecution with hate, God wants us to live in hope - lovingly praying for our enemies and calling them to repentance and faith whenever the opportunity arises. God wants us to do this because he is patient – not wanting any to be lost. *As I live, declares the LORD God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from their way and live.*ⁱⁱ

Part Three: Be sure of their destiny.

Sadly, many enemies of the Gospel will refuse to turn to Christ in faith and live. They will continue to fight against God to the end. What will happen to such people at the harvest? Jesus tells us:

⁴⁰*Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

As I mentioned, even though darnels look harmless, they host a dangerous, deadly mould. Therefore, they must be separated from the wheat at harvest and destroyed. What is true for darnels

is also true regarding unbelievers: even though they look harmless, the devil's dangerous mould is in them. They need to be separated from believers and destroyed so that everything and everyone that causes sin might be thoroughly eradicated and never threaten to corrupt God's people again.

That severe warning of what will happen on judgement day helps us understand why God wants us to be patient. He does not want anyone lost to hell. For that very reason, He sent Jesus to die for the world's sins. For that same reason, He urges us to do all we can to share His Good news of forgiveness in Christ with everyone – especially those who don't know him - so that many more might repent and be saved.

But Jesus also gives us an extraordinary promise to help us endure the hardship we suffer for his sake: *then* [after Judgement day] *the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*. Oh, how happy we will be when Christ comes again. There will be no more sorrow, disappointment, mockery, or persecution. Nothing evil or painful will ever hurt us again. Instead, we will live with Christ in glory as God's dearly loved children forever.

Jesus concludes his explanation of his parable with the statement: *Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear*. In other words, Jesus wants everyone to take his warning and comfort seriously. His seeming tolerance of all the evil done on this earth does not mean he's ok with it or doesn't care. He cares so much that he punished Jesus for all sin. God is patient – not wanting a single soul lost to hell. But His patience does have a limit in that he will not allow the devil and his allies to deceive his elect. He will keep his promise to judge the world – casting into hell those who refused to repent after all his repeated warnings. He will also keep his promise to deliver all his sons and daughters through faith in Christ to their home in paradise, where they will live with him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. May this hope help us patiently tolerate the evil done to us today as we proclaim Christ to the world around us in love. Amen.

ⁱ John 8:44 EHV

ⁱⁱ Ezekiel 33:11 EHV