

Sermon – [SLIDE ‘Growing with the Weeds’] Final Draft

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Mark Knauss

We have another parable of Jesus about the kingdom of heaven. The good seeds have been sown, but while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. I know something about weeds. I am the proud owner of a lot of them. **[SLIDE – Picture of weeds in a yard]**. The deer in Strongsville eat all of our Hostas and flowers. Furthermore, we need some foundation work done on our house, and the yard will need to be dug up– so we gave up this year on our flower beds. As a consequence, we have quite an array of weeds. I don’t want to start pulling them because then things will begin to stand out. I would instead just let them all grow, so it looks like I am planning something.

Surprisingly, it doesn’t look too bad. Perhaps I am just getting used to it. Some bushes and ivy remain dominant and stand above the weeds. It just makes some conversations awkward when we meet people in front of our house. Maybe I will get a sign and plant it right in the weed garden that says, “We gave up!”

Our parable today is about a farmer who is planting wheat, and an enemy has planted weeds. The weeds grow and get entangled in the wheat. Their roots become intertwined. This is a real problem. The workers suggest pulling the weeds, but the owner says, **[SLIDE. 29... ‘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.’”]**

The writer of Matthew is dealing with anxiety in this new community of believers. What do we do? What do we do with people whom we believe are obstructing God's mission? What do we do with those in our company who clearly, or not so clearly, are against us? Do we simply remove them from our midst? The owner of the field says no!

One reason we are not to pull the weeds is that we might make a mistake. We could be pulling out what we think is a weed but is a wheat plant. Some believe Matthew's writer is referring to a wild grass in Israel that looks much like a wheat plant. It becomes easier to tell them apart when the plants have matured. It would be easy, early on, to pull out what we believe is a weed but is not.

Similarly, we might think we know someone who we believe is a weed but is not. This fits in well with the fact that we are not to judge one another. In this same Gospel of Matthew, we find in chapter 7, verse 1, **[SLIDE Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged"]**.

When we judge, we are standing in God's place. I think we are in a time when our religious bumper stickers can move up to the next level. A good one could be, **[Slide "Leave the judging up to God!"]** If I saw that on the bumper of a car driving recklessly, I might be a little suspicious. Regardless, God is the judge. We are not. The Master tells us to leave the judging, the weed pulling, up to God.

One of the reasons we are not to judge each other is because people change. Weeds do not turn into wheat, but people do change. I have met countless people who transformed their lives when faced with medical challenges. Unlike plants, people have the ability to do an *about face*, and reverse course.

Perhaps we cannot judge each other because none of us can be summed up in one over-riding statement. We are all complicated, not one dimensional like we see on Facebook. Do you have a friend you know and understand, but others don't look upon them with the same warmth and affection? Perhaps their name comes up in a social setting, and someone rolls their eyes. You either think, or say, "You don't know him as I know him," or "She can be difficult, but she has a big heart." Maybe there have been situations where people have said that about us.

The God who knows the number of hairs on our heads tells us not to judge. After all, God knows each of us better than we know each other. Perhaps the Master knows us better than we know ourselves, and does not want others judging us!

The field owner wants the wheat and the weeds to grow together **[SLIDE OF WHEAT/WEED GROWING TOGETHER]**. Similarly, God wants us to be in relationship with each other. If the gardener pulls out the weed, the wheat plant can come out because the roots are intertwined. Like those intertwined roots, we are connected in this world. I am connected to you, my coworkers, friends, family, neighbors, and seminary classmates.

We moved Gabriella to South Carolina this past week, and I rented a moving van. I was driving between our hotel room and Gabriella's apartment when a car sped up and wanted to communicate with me as he pulled up alongside. I was thinking, "this may not be a friendly 'welcome to the neighborhood.'" Drivers are not always friendly to those behind the wheel of a large moving van. I finally looked over at him, and he told me that the back gate to the truck wasn't secure and was moving up and down. I was grateful for his help and secured the door. That day I was connected to him, even for a brief moment.

We do not know how this whole wheat and weed situation will shake out in the end. We do know that God will prevail. We know that God does not want us to uproot each other, but rather grow together. Our roots, our lives, are intertwined. We are called to be in relationship with the world. The Master in our parable is worried that the crop will be damaged if the workers try to pull out what they think are weeds. The Master is patient and calls us to be the same.

I went to an orientation class for my internship that will hopefully be starting next year. We had a panel of people who are currently interns. One of them said that the first thing she did when she moved to a new part of the country for her internship was to connect with the people of the community outside of the church. She plays ultimate frisbee and joined a club or two **[SLIDE of Ultimate Frisbee]**. Over time, they came to know her and were surprised she was training to be a pastor. She purposefully sought to be in a relationship with people who were not from her church. She wanted to entangle her roots with the community.

I want to bring in another particularity of this parable. We read this Gospel story and automatically assume that we are the wheat, and other people are the weeds. **[Slide of wheat and weeds]**. Some days I feel like wheat. Other days I feel like a weed. What about days I think I am wheat, but it looks to others like I am a weed? I am grateful that God tells us to leave the judging (and weed pulling) up to God. That's good news because I really want to be wheat, even on my bad days.

Our world likes to think in a binary mode. Are you a weed or a wheat plant? But it is not that easy. We are not binary people. We are complex creatures created and loved by God. The Master calls us to be tolerant of each other and thrive next to the weeds, sharing the same

sunlight and rain from the heavens. We can do that simply because the Master tells us to. We are to be like wheat growing in God's kingdom- like grain flourishing in the fields. AMEN