

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

<sup>27</sup> “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

<sup>28</sup> “ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

<sup>29</sup> “ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ ” ...

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

<sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

<sup>40</sup> “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

### What will We do about the Weeds in the World?

I grew up on the other side of the state, in Dowagiac, a town of about 9,000 people. There weren’t many jobs for teenagers there at that time. When I was in high school, a MacDonal’s opened in town. They did hire kids, but for every position they had, probably seven or eight kids applied. Since I went to boarding school, I had no chance of getting a job there. So I worked on farms. One of my least favorite things to do during those long hot summers was hoeing. The farmer would take you out to the field and drop you at one with a hoe in your hand. You had to walk the length of the field, chopping out weeds between the plants. The way I remember it, those rows were so long that you couldn’t even see the other end. It was hot, miserable, boring work. You know what happened when you got tired? You started to swing you hoe a little wild. Instead of weeds, you started taking out bean or tomato or pepper plants or whatever was supposed to be in the field. I tried not to do that, but it was impossible to spend a day swinging that hoe without it happening.

When I read the parable that Jesus told in our gospel lesson for today, I can’t help but think about that experience. We live in a very different age. We have different tools, a different climate, a very different approach to farming. Yet, the problem that Jesus built this parable around exists everywhere that people grow crops: weeds. But Jesus isn’t giving us advice about farming. He has a much greater lesson he wants to teach. Maybe we could get at his point with a question: **what are we going to do about the weeds in this world?**

The parable begins with a farmer sowing seed. But his problem was more than just your ordinary weed problem that every farmer faces. While he was sleeping, an enemy sowed the seeds of weeds into his field. So when the wheat and the weeds both came up, the weeds were thick and hopelessly mixed with the wheat. The farmer’s workers immediately recognized that there had to be a problem with the seeds. The farmer figured out what must have happened. But what should they do about it? Should they pull up all those weeds? Weeds suck nutrients and water out of the soil. The more weeds you have, the smaller your crop is going to be. But it’s not that easy to just pull the weeds. Every year, I help my wife weed her garden. You know what always happens? The roots of the weeds get all tangled up with the roots of the good plants. So sometimes, when you pull the weeds, the good plant comes up with them. Then, of course, you have to hide the evidence from your wife, right? This farmer didn’t want his wheat crop uprooted, so he decided to just let both grow. When harvest time came, he would have his workers first the pull the weeds and burn them. Then they would harvest the wheat.

What does this parable mean? Jesus explains that the field is the world. The wheat represents “the sons of the kingdom” or believers, while the weeds represent “the sons of the evil one” or unbelievers. The harvest is Judgment Day. The harvesters are the angels and the one who sowed the good seed is Jesus himself. The enemy who sowed the bad seed is the devil. Jesus is picturing for us the reality that we see every day. We live in a world where believers and unbelievers are hopelessly mixed together. Our problem is more than just an occasional unbeliever taking root among us like the natural weed problem that exists in every field I’ve ever worked in. This world is overrun with weeds. The enemy has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams in corrupting God’s field. Everywhere we look, we see unbelievers. They rule the world.

What is the effect? First of all, they make it harder for us to practice our faith openly and boldly. Secondly, their sinful attitudes completely overwhelm our society. Everywhere we turn, we see sin and unbelief. I know a young woman, a Lutheran, who’s studying animation at an art school. This week, she posted an animated short that two of her classmates made. She was raving about how great it was. It’s all about a young boy who doesn’t have the courage to tell another young boy that he loves him. I just had to shake my head that a confirmed WELS Lutheran would post this as such a wonderful video. But that’s the world we live in. Every kind of unchristian attitude is out there. We live in a society that glorifies getting drunk. People regularly go out to get hammered. As long as they have a designated driver, it’s OK. Getting drunk is a sin, even if I don’t drive. But how many of us accept that unchristian attitude? We see so much divorce that we just accept it. We live in a society that is defined by “me first” and we drink deep of that egotism. In fact, it’s so bad that when our pastors point out things that God’s Word teaches that we don’t like, such as church fellowship or the roles of women, we call those things “WELS teachings” instead of “the Bible’s teachings.” Aren’t we really daring to pass judgment on those teachings? Aren’t we trying to distance ourselves just a little bit from those unpopular stands that our church makes?

We live in a world that’s overrun with sin and unbelief. Just turn on the TV. You’ll see it on the news. You’ll see it in every TV show, even cartoons. How do we react to it? Thankfully, we don’t always just accept it. God’s Word does speak to us and we recognize our faith is under attack. Sometimes, we get downright angry. Sometimes, we get defensive or frustrated. But where do we go from there? Jesus was concerned about that. He didn’t want us to accept our society’s sin and unbelief. But he was also concerned about the ditch on the other side of the road. Jesus doesn’t want us to despair. He doesn’t want us to think that we can’t win this fight. He doesn’t want us to be so beaten down by the sin and unbelief around us that we forget his promises. He doesn’t want the unbelievers to choke our fruits of faith, to silence us, to finally lead us to give up our faith. So he told us this parable to warn us.

And he told this parable to give us hope. What we see around us today is not the end of the story. Jesus is coming back. When he does, he’s going to undo all that sin has done here. Jesus said, **“The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”** When Judgment Day comes, we won’t be mixed in with unbelievers anymore. We won’t be choked by their sin anymore. They won’t rule the world or contaminate society with their false ideas anymore. The unbelievers will get what God has been promising them since the Garden of Eden: they will go to hell forever. But the believers will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. Did you catch what else Jesus said? He didn’t just say that the angels would separate us from unbelievers. He said that the angels will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin. What does Jesus mean by “his kingdom” in this parable? It’s the world he made. The angels are going to purify this world. There will be nothing left here to hurt our faith, nothing left here that leads us into sin.

What is the thing that causes you and me to sin most? Isn’t our own sinful hearts? It’s the Old Man that still lives inside us. It’s the ego, that our society does such a good job of stroking. On Judgment Day, the angels will weed that sin out of the hearts of all believers who are still alive. If we die before that, it’ll happen even sooner. They’re going to cleanse the created world of everything else that sin has done and everything else that causes sin. Then, here, in our Father’s kingdom, we are going to shine like the sun.

We’re going to live perfect lives. We’re going to sing our Savior’s praises. We’re going to experience perfect joy and produce endless fruits of faith. We’re going to love God with all that we are and love our neighbor as ourselves, perfectly, forever. In other words, the world that we see and struggle with, the world that alternates between frustrating us with its sin and lulling us into sinful thinking, that world will be gone forever. It will be replaced with the paradise that God always wanted us to have.

You and I will be there. Not because we're such great Christians. But because of Jesus. He faced sin and sinners in this world just like we do. He wrestled with it. It broke his heart to see their unbelief. He testified to the truth and followed his Father's will, even when he knew they would hate him for it. He even experienced the temptations that come with the pressure to conform to sinful thinking. But Jesus had no sinful nature. So he was perfect in his faith while he wrestled with life in this sinful world. He was perfectly fruitful in God's kingdom. He was that Christian for us. As you've heard me say so often, God sees us as perfect Christians because Jesus was.

And Jesus died and paid for all the times we gave up and adopted the sinful attitudes of our society. Jesus died and paid for all the times we got so angry that we couldn't think straight and for all the times that we failed to trust him when we saw how ugly life is. He died and paid for all the times our faith was less than perfect. Since he already paid, we won't have to. Jesus has taken away the sin of the entire world. That certainly includes us. He rose to make sure we know that. He rose to point to the day when he will return and we will rise and shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

We deal with the weeds of this world by turning to Jesus and letting him deal with them. He is still in charge. He has a plan. He will return at exactly the right moment. Until that moment comes, he calls us to trust him. He sees us today. He knows what the weeds are doing to us. He knows the temptations and the struggles we face. He will be with us. He will give us strength through his gospel. He will not let those weeds tangle up our roots so that we die when they're pulled out. He will bring us home.

He calls us to watch and pray while we wait for that moment. Focus on him for strength and courage in an evil and dying world. He calls us to share the gospel while we're here. Jesus' plan is to bring in all the wheat – all the children of the kingdom – all the elect. Before the world began, he chose us to believe. The world can't end until all the chosen ones have faith. But he doesn't give us our faith in lightning bolts from heaven. He works through the gospel. He works through baptism and the spoken word. He works through pastors and teachers patiently explaining his love. And he works through you, through ordinary Christians, sharing their faith with their children and their friends and neighbors and co-workers. He works when we speak. Be a part of his work.

One of my pet peeves here at Peace is the flower beds out in front of our church. They're on the opposite side of the church from our parking lot, so we don't see them when we come and go. But you see them when you drive past the church. They often get overgrown with weeds and thistles. Some years, there's a forest of thistle plants out in front of our church. It doesn't send a good message to the community about our commitment to our mission. But it does illustrate the spiritual reality we face. Every year, we go out there in the spring and in the fall and we rip those thistles out by their roots. We put down Round Up to keep them from coming back. Sometimes, it even works for a while. But they always come back. In my opinion, the only way to get rid of them is to pave those flower beds. Some nice green concrete would do the trick! But if we did that, there wouldn't be any more flowers. God could just pave over this world and give up. God could rip up all the weeds and in the process rip up countless Christians whose roots are intertwined with the unbelievers we live among. God could just wipe his hands of us and start over. But he won't. He sent Jesus to die and rise and rescue us. He sent the gospel and gave us faith. He gave us work to do. He watches over us and blesses our efforts and nurtures our faith. Jesus will come back and free us from all sin and then we will shine like the sun in our Father's kingdom. Trust God's plan. Don't lose hope. Do the work he gave us to do. Amen.