

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.
²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶
 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “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?’

²⁸ “ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

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

²⁹ “ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰
 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.’ ”

³⁶ 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.”

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ 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, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴²
 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ 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’s Wrong with the World?

One of our local pastors has told me – several times – that every day, he looks up into the sky and says, “Today would be a good day for the Lord to come back.” And I always agree with him. He’s said that a lot over the last six months – and I think we can all understand why. But it would be easy to overemphasize things like COVID and protests. Before those things started, I never had difficulty finding examples for my sermons of all that’s wrong with this world. Some of us – maybe even for most of us – carry hurts in our hearts that predate those things and that for us personally make the anxiety we’ve felt these few months seem like relatively small potatoes. None of us wants to get the coronavirus – but how many of us have longstanding family issues that we wish we knew how to heal? How many of us have financial difficulties that predated the shut downs and executive orders? How many of us were struggling with depression or with a tendency to drink too much or with behaviors that only caused pain and frustration in our lives, but that we just kept doing? Have any of those things gone away? Life hurt long before any of us ever heard of COVID-19. To a certain extent, you could argue that the news media exists because of bad news. Their whole business model is built on the reality that there will always been something bad to report, and most of us can’t turn away, even when that news horrifies us. At times, even we Christians may be tempted to throw up our hands and shout: **what’s wrong with the world?**

I.

Because we’re Christians, we know the answer to that question. What’s wrong with the world is sin. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God cursed this world to punish sinners and also to discipline us, his children. Sin makes our lives hurt. Jesus speaks this morning about the reality of the world we live in. He makes an important point about all that difficulties we see here. When we have to ask, **what’s wrong with this world?** Jesus tells us, **it’s actually better than it could be.**

This morning, Jesus tells us a parable. It was one of his favorite ways of teaching. We sometimes say that parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. The parable of the weeds among the wheat isn’t about good farming techniques or even about the destructiveness of feuds. All parables teach us something about our relationship to God and his plan to bring us home to heaven. Jesus liked to tell parables that dealt with farming because his people were farmers. Almost every family in his day would have had at least had a vegetable garden, if not a field. So these parables made sense to his people.

In this particular parable, a man planted a field of wheat. Then something shocking happened: an enemy came during the night and scattered seeds of weeds in that field. You would really have to hate somebody to gather the seeds of weeds and then scatter them in that person's field. Think about the result. My wife plants a vegetable garden every year. And my least favorite part of it is weeding. You could do it every week if you really wanted to keep it clear. Imagine how bad it would be if someone deliberately planted weeds in the field. It was so bad that you could tell as soon as the plants sprang up that this wasn't the usual problem all farmers have with weeds. This had to be deliberate.

They servants wanted to know what the owner wanted to do about it. Should they go through the field and pull up those weeds? Wisely, the owner said no. That's hard enough to do in my wife's garden, where she carefully plants everything in nice, neat rows. Even then, we sometimes pull up good plants with the weeds we're trying to remove. In Jesus' day, they didn't plant the wheat in nice neat rows. They took handfuls of seed and threw it out onto the field. The weeds would've been sown the same way. So there would've been a tangle of weeds and wheat all coming up together. Weeds are so much stronger than good plants. It wouldn't take long until you had way more weeds than wheat in your field. And the real problem with weeds is that they suck up water and nutrients from the soil. They compete with the good seed and choke it off. If you don't weed your garden, most of the time, you're going to have smaller plants and fewer vegetables, because the weeds are so good at competing with more desirable plants.

This parable means is a picture of life as we know it. The field is the world. The good seed represents us – all believers in Jesus, and the sower is Jesus himself who brings us to faith. The enemy is the devil and the weeds are all those people who don't believe in Jesus. The farmer is God himself. God created a perfect world and he put perfect people in it. But the devil hates God. He cannot attack God himself, so he ruined God's perfect world. He led Adam and Eve into sin and he twisted human nature so badly that the number of believers in this world is always going to be a minority. Just like wheat among weeds, our lives are a constant battle with unbelievers. They are so good at success in this life, and if we truly live the kind of generous, humble lives Jesus calls us to live, we are often at a disadvantage. And let's be honest: our fruits of faith – our good deeds – are never what they should be. Living here among the unbelievers makes it harder for us to follow Jesus. It's hard to do the right thing when so many people are doing the wrong thing. It's hard to put Jesus first when there are so many pleasures in this life, when there is so much competition to have more money and nicer things. The weeds are the opinion makers of our society. They control what gets put on TV and most of what you see on the internet. We spend our whole lives repenting of the fact that our sinful hearts want what the weeds have and what they offer. That is the world we live in.

But notice why that is: because the farmer would not let the servants uproot the weeds. Why not? Well he said, **“While you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.”** So the man decided to let them all grow together. At the harvest, he would separate the weeds from the wheat. What does that tell us? The God who loves us always does what is best for us. If he would've intervened when Adam and Eve sinned – or any time after that – and simply eliminated the unbelievers and started over, what would that have meant for us? At the very least, it would mean that our ancestors would not have existed – so presumably we would not exist today. Or it could mean that we would be uprooted with the weeds and lose our faith before we reached heaven. But the owner of the field was not willing to sacrifice some of the wheat so that the rest would be more fruitful. He accepted a smaller crop of fruits. He endured months of watching weeds grow and choke his precious wheat. He permitted the wheat to struggle every day to get its share of water and nutrients because doing something else would've been worse.

Now, we can't really know what would've happened in our lives if God had dealt with Adam and Eve differently. And we can't know what would've happened in our lives if he dealt with us, or with our society differently than he actually has. What we know is that he always does what is best for us, his church, his people, his wheat. That is true for you and me today, in the midst of all that's happened in the last six months and in the midst of all the hurt and sorrows we have to face all our lives. That means that if our lives were different today, we would be in worse shape today, at least spiritually. Now, that doesn't mean we would understand that. We might think we could be much better off. We might weigh the good and bad that we can see and say that something different would be so much better than living the life God has allowed us to actual face. But that just isn't true. This is the life God calls us to live. And he calls us to trust that he always does what is best for us.

So if we can't know what our lives would be like if they were different, how can we be certain that this life is what's best for us? By remembering who controls our lives: Jesus who spoke these words to us. Jesus who scattered the seed – who brought the gospel to us and made us believers. Jesus who left heaven itself behind to live a life of pain and sorrow that more than equaled any of the hurts we face. Jesus who was perfect in our place, who never doubted or spoke a sinful word or committed a sinful action, all so that God could call us perfect and holy. Jesus who died and paid for all the sin we are guilty of, for all the hurt we inflict on ourselves and on the people around us. Jesus who rose, who conquered death and hell and sin and pain. Jesus who endures the agony of watching sin run rampant here because that's what he has to do to bring every one of his children home. Jesus who will watch over us every day of our lives. Jesus who will bring us to heaven and on the last day, raise us, and purify this world and give us eternal life with him. That's who makes this promise. Trust that you are living the life he calls you to live.

II.

When my wife pants a garden, she often thins out the plants that come up for the exact same reason that she weeds it: so that the plants aren't competing for water and nutrients. We weed that garden and we accept a few accidental losses so that the whole garden produces more fruits. God wants fruits of faith from us. But he also wants every one of us to make it to heaven. So he acts differently than my wife does in his garden. He accepts a sinful world that fights against our fruits every single day. Now, he does intervene in our lives with blessings and protection, often more than we know. But he won't end pain and sorrow and sin until he returns. So when we look around at this broken world and ask, **what's wrong with this world?** Jesus smiles and promises us, **it's on its way to perfection.**

The weeds don't win. They make look like they do. I always wonder why weeds grow so much better than the good seed. Sometimes, we plant seed and it doesn't even come up. But the weeds go nuts. It looks like the weeds in Jesus' parable are winning. It looks like the best way to live is to go along and get along, to live like everybody else in this world lives. But on Judgment Day, God is going to send out the angels to separate the weeds and the wheat. In the parable, the weeds will be tied up in bundles and thrown into the fire. Hell is real and it's waiting for all those who dream that following the ways of this sinful world is the road to happiness.

And the wheat that struggled just to survive, the wheat that tried to produce fruit but often found that the kernels were smaller and fewer than they should have been, the wheat that so often felt hurt and frustrated and broken – we, the wheat, will win. Jesus said, **“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”** I know that doesn't really fit with the wheat and weeds metaphor, but Jesus does that on purpose. He lifts our heads up – away from staring at the ground where the weeds are growing down here to the sky where the sun is shining. After all the hurts and all the struggle comes glory. After all the times that the weeds won and we lost, we win because Jesus won and he will carry us to victory.

That's what we're looking forward to and when that day comes, we won't even care how hard it was to get there. I'm sure my friend is going to look up into the sky today and say, “This would be a good day for Jesus to come back.” Yes, it would. And that will be true every day until he does. And then we will win. Look forward to that day when all that's wrong with this world is fixed and we live with Jesus forever. Amen.