

Dane Wood

Sermon

Mt 13: 24-30, 36-43

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Weeds in the Wheat

Matthew 13:24-30

²⁴ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ ²⁸ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.’ ³⁰ Let 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.”

Matthew 13:36-43

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” ³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send

his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears ^[g]listen!

Sermon

1. So... Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Be wheat, go to heaven... don't be a weed and burn in hell. We done? What? Is it not that simple? Of course not, so... lesson 1, don't read a parable like this and just assume its simple. Let's be real, I read these verses and it doesn't sound like the God I think I know. This sounds like all the reasons I don't want to go to church... a bunch of people who are righteous and perfect, and then everybody else. The holy rollers go to heaven... and the weeds, everyone else, go to hell. This starts making my collar a little tight. But naturally, there is more to this story.
2. First, we are in the book of Matthew. This parable only appears here, its special to Matthew and communicates something this writer wanted to say more than the other Gospel writers. Matthew is writing to the Hebrew people, portraying Christ as both the High Priest and King of Israel. But the people of Israel are divided, spread out, and believe many different things. You've got groups rebelling against the Romans and Greeks before them, zealots and religious fighters. You've got the Pharisees, the Temple Scribes, the Sadducees, each with their own agendas. You've a Temple filled with opposing views, and a world around them with even more. You've got Republicans over here, Democrats over there, people fighting for Liberty and others for Equality. The

ancient world and ours is not always so different. And Matthew portrays Christ as the unifying force, the one to bring it all together, and this parable speaks to that.

3. The second thing that strikes me, before we analyze the parable directly, is something else that resembles a modern issue we share. “Cancel Culture.” For those unfamiliar with the term, it’s a modern practice of removing, blocking, wiping away things which offend, disagree, or wrong oneself. It’s the notion that since “Gone with the Wind” is racially problematic, you can never watch or read it again... or Mark Twain for that matter. Or because Harvey Weinstein abused many persons, we can no longer enjoy any movie associated with him. If I’m a staunch believer in LGBTQ rights, I can never eat a chick-fil-a sandwich. It goes on and on, and it occurs on both sides of our 2 party system, and every where in between. We convince ourselves that we are right and the other is wrong. We wrongfully make issues 2 sided when they are multifaceted. We block, unfollow, and ignore anyone or anything that disagrees with our own way of thinking. We create bubbles and silos and try to live only inside them, excluding all others. This is hardly a new issue, it goes back to the ancient world and has shown itself as pretty much any ‘-ism’ you can imagine for ages. “Cancel Culture” is not about justice... it’s about power, who has it, and who doesn’t. This parable is about that.
4. Our story begins with a man who has sown good seed in a field, but something else has also happened: in the night an enemy came and sowed bad seed as well. This may sound a bit strange to us modern city folk, but it actually wasn't that uncommon a practice in the ancient Roman world. There was actually a codified Roman law prohibiting the sowing of weeds in other people’s fields. They don't make a law unless someone is out doing

this. In India, in some places to this day, one of the greatest threats a person can make to their enemy is to say, "I will sow bad seed in your field."

5. But what is this bad seed being sown. You may have heard this story called the Wheat and the Tares before, "Tares" is the old English word for a kind of weed, in Greek, called "Darnel." And in this particular verse, the Greek words tell us it is specifically "Bearded Darnel" or to be scientific, "*lolium temulentum*".
6. Now this weed, growing in a field of wheat, is problematic for a few reasons. The first, and perhaps most important reasons, is it looks just like Wheat. Especially when it is sprouting. Even an expert wheat farmer cannot tell the difference between a Wheat and a Tare. It so closely resembled Wheat that in Hebrew it was called "Zunim" which means "Wheat this is born out of wedlock." (Or another word but you get the idea.) There was a myth that this wheat had come around during the time of Noah, before the flood when the world was filled with evil. These Tares were a wheat that had become corrupted. So they were closely related, these weeds and this wheat, a story and background Jesus would have known and his listeners.
7. Another major problem is that Wheat and Tares are hard to separate, both while growing and after harvest. Wheat has a shallow root system while the roots of Tares grow in a web and tangle up with other roots. They generally intertwine with the wheat so much so that to pull one meant you would pull the other. I was once told there is only one good way to tell if a plant is a weed. You pull it up, and if it comes up easy, well, that wasn't a weed. In this case, the wheat and the weed will come up together, so it's a lose-lose situation. Wheat and Bearded Darnel is troublesome after harvest too. The general practice when you had some in your field was to just reap it all at the same time. They

would then lay out all the grain seeds and would go through them, by hand, picking out the Bearded Darnel from the wheat. It was a time-consuming task, and important because the weed was mildly poisonous.

8. So our farmer who sowed the good wheat seed is in a pickle. He's got some really annoying and troublesome weeds coming up with his wheat. What is he to do now? His workers, the servants, they ask to go and collect them. "Let's pull the weeds." But he stops them dead in their tracks. "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them."
9. Alright Dane, this isn't The History of Ancient Wheat Farming 101, get to the point. What does any of this have to do with our polarized society and "Cancel Culture"? I want to frame it in a church situation. What's our response if I ask you, as Pastor, "How do we pull the weeds from our church and community?" I imagine, had I not just discussed this parable, our responses would be, "Get rid of those people and things that cause problems." "Great," I'd say, "Easy enough, we'll get rid of those, but how will we keep them out after they are gone?" And a common refrain we've heard of late might be said. "Build a wall. Block them out, we'll only let people in we trust." "Hmmm," I'd reply, "If we do that... we may get rid of the evil in our church... but what makes you think there will be any good left inside it?"
10. One of the greatest sins of the Christian Church in my opinion is we think we know how things work... That we have got it figured out, either as individuals or as churches, and Lord, to we let others know it. We are right and everyone else is wrong. The different groups of Jesus time thought the same thing. The Sadducees said you worship God this way, and the Pharisees said you did it that way. The Samaritans, those northern

Israelites, they are wrong, those Yankees, and Judah, the south, well obviously the south worships God correctly. We at Grace, we worship God right, and the others are just dying in their stale and shallow worship. Maybe we should just do things on our own, they don't agree with us, they are just weeds poisoning this church, "those people" are just problems. I'm hoping the dots are getting connected and you see this is a game we are all playing all the time, and its frankly a game that is not meant for us.

- 11.** As Disciples of Jesus Christ, we should have given up our old burdens and instead should be pulling Christ's yoke, walking along side. We are the wheat in God the Farmer's field. Yes, weeds will get in, it's a fact of life on a Fallen earth. And this is a story about reminding you what your job is. The world around us, the evil that is out there, it plants weeds all over, in our communities, in our church, in our friends, and in us. You can only account for yourself... it's not the job of the Wheat to pull the weeds. That's the farmer's job, the farmer is the one who holds the power and determines justice... not us. God has some servants working the field on God's behalf, pastors and leaders called to work some fields, but guess what, even we don't have a clue sometimes. If I just pulled every thing from this church that looked like a weed... and I see a lot of you... there would be no church left, because I, as a human, lack the wisdom.
- 12.** Now, do not mistake my meaning here. This does not mean you are to do nothing. "If salt has lost its taste, how can it's saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot." So, you should be doing something... Wheat has one job, grow and produce fruit. We are called to produce the fruits of the spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. You should be actively producing this in your life, not just reflecting on them,

not just wishing you did them more, you should be pumping them out of your spirit like a factory. And that means speaking in Love with those who are against you. Bringing Joy to the down trodden, being at peace with yourself and others, patiently and humbly allowing others before yourself, being kind and good to even the evil and weeds around you, trusting not in your own way but in Christs, be soft in manner and resisting your selfish urges.

- 13.** In doing these things, we spread the Good News that Christ has saved us and everyone else. To produce those fruits, it requires us to let go, to get yoked with Christ, it requires us to surrender ourselves... it does not require you pull the first weed from someone else. Let the Sower of the Good Seed, the Good Shepherd... God will sort the flock. Christ has sheep of another fold and wheat in other fields that you don't even know about. In the end, he'll call to all of us and them, and there will be one flock, one Kingdom of Heaven in Christ.
- 14.** So the next time you find yourself with a great urge to Cancel someone else out... pause, and instead, produce a fruit of the spirit and give it to them as a gift.