

“In the Weeds”

Psalms 84; Matthew 13:24-30

August 28, 2022

I gotta tell you, at some level, preaching these parables from Matthew 13 has been quite a chore for me. As it would turn out, I have a bit of a black thumb. It started out when I was in college. My mom gave me a fern to sit outside of my front door of my very first apartment in Atlanta. That thing withered away until the property manager asked me to throw it away.

So, I'm a little out of my depth when it comes to talking about these particular parables. We've been talking about parables all summer long and I've said a lot about what they are and how they work in the broader Gospels but I do want to mention this. At core, parables are something by way of a comparison. A parable means “a comparing together” or “laying one thing aside from the other.”

Jesus made liberal use of parables, telling 40 during the course of His ministry. Parables were used because they're accessible and easy to understand. Jesus took the stuff of everyday life and used them in order to advance His Kingdom. Parables were ways of engaging entire crowds. Anytime you see a master story teller, and you see how captivated an audience can be, it is staggering awareness. I imagine how winsome Jesus was and how His ability to tell parables made it such that His sheep would understand. And this particular parable deals with some of the deepest, potentially scariest stuff in the entire Bible.

Years ago, I'd made friends with our local UPS driver. Friends, maybe just more like good acquaintances. We'd gotten to know each other because Joel was the delivery driver both for our home and for the church I was serving at the time, First Presbyterian over in Mount Holly. Well, it was nearing Christmas time and, as such, I'd been seeing a lot of Joel, delivering stuff to my house for Christmas and the church for various reasons. Well, that particular year we had the tragedy in New Towne. As news of the massacre reached my ears, Joel arrived with a package. I don't remember how, maybe he saw the sadness of my face, but we talked for a bit about what was going on. In light of the Christmas season, we both prayed that “Jesus would come, and that right quickly.” It was a poignant scene for me that day as we wept together briefly in the midst of our work days.

It's events like that massacre or the one recently in Uvalde that give us pause. A chill goes down our spine as anger rises up in us. “Who is in charge of this place” we wonder. And, if we're honest, we have to grapple with the toughest question of all – “If we worship a Good God, why is there evil in this world.” School shootings, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, these are the kinds of tragic events which thrust the spotlight on the fact that this world is still quite broken in some very real ways.

One of the age-old questions has do with the problem of evil. Why is there evil in the world? People wonder where did it come from and why doesn't God do something about it?

This question grows even more serious now that Jesus has come. Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God had arrived in His person. So, now the question becomes, if the kingdom has already come, and Jesus is the King, then why is there still so much evil in the world? Why didn't Jesus take care of it the first time He came? Jesus has just told the parable of the sower to explain why there are different responses to the gospel. Now He tells the parable of the weeds to explain why there is still evil in the world even though the King has already come. *How can there be evil the world when God's kingdom has come?* That's the question we are going to be looking at this morning as we study this parable together.

First, Jesus tells the parable of the weeds. The story itself is very simple. Wheat and weeds are sown together in a field. Pulling up the weeds right now would harm the wheat. And so, the best strategy is to let them both grow together until the harvest and wait until then to separate them. So, let's take a closer look at the story together.

First, a man and his enemy sow wheat and weeds together in a field. Take a look at verses 24-26 where we read: **Matthew 13:24-26** – *“Jesus told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.”* Again, we see Jesus use these everyday things like wheat and weeds to give these breathtaking insights into the Kingdom of God.

Ultimately, the parable teaches us four distinct lessons. The first is God has a plan and He is working it out over time. Have you ever had one of those days when everything is just clicking for you, things are really going your way? In those times, it feels like life is gliding along a smooth rail, that there's a plan and a purpose to your life. Other days come and, I don't know, the kids won't do what you're asking them to do or your boss isn't particularly nice to you, could be anything. But on those days, it feels like life is just plain chaos. Well, life can absolutely feel like both given the day and the occasion. But the Christian response is to look at this parable and say that God is working out a plan. It's a plan He had I'm convinced. Before the dawn of time. When we look back in our Bibles to Genesis 3, we find an important verse. God declares that one day, the Son of man will strike the heel, and kill, the serpent. Called the proto evangelion by Calvin, this verse strongly suggests that Jesus' death and resurrection weren't a plan B, so to speak, but were instead the plan from all eternity.

And the good news is that we know who wins. John's Gospel, 16th chapter, verse 33 – *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* God has a plan and it is working out in front of us. It's helpful to remember where we're heading. Remember, Revelation tells us that our destiny is to dwell in a place that's never dark because it's always light from the light of God. In that place, revelation teaches us that there will be no sickness, no sadness, no death even. A glorious place. That may be our final destiny, but it's not where we're at quite yet.

In the meantime, this parable suggests that we be patient. Are there any words more difficult to swallow than those, “be patient”? They are generally said, of course, when we're not being patient. But patience, as is said, is a virtue and for good reason. Patience is what keeps us from making bad decisions based on incomplete data. I remember one time staying on hold with some company for an hour, only to discover later that my wife had already handled the problem. Had I been patient, and waited for my wife like she'd asked me to, I wouldn't have wasted my time.

So, if God has a plan and is working it out, that means we have to be patient. And that means we have to be patient with other people. We're going to talk about judgment later onto a greater extent but for now, realize, that as you deal with people, you might see nothing but weed. But you're not to pull them up, for that is the opposite of what the parable suggests. Now, notice, that doesn't mean we have to be silent, especially not in the face of evil. We must stand up and do what we can so that evil is held as much at bay as possible. Which brings us to the second point of our parable.

There is an enemy at work in the world. Now listen, spreading weeds into someone's wheat field is just downright despicable so we get the sense of what kind of enemy we're up against. I confess, this is the hardest part of the Christian faith for me to talk about. At heart, I'm a bit of a scientist. I like to know that things add up in the real world. And because of that, I'm challenged by the awareness of evil spirits or the devil himself. But these are matters clearly discussed in our scripture and as much as I try to rationalize them away, they still remain. We think of the devil and maybe we think of a cartoonish figure with pointy horns and a red face. Or maybe we think of a comic book figure who sits on our shoulder as we debate our decisions between doing the right thing and doing the wrong thing. But no matter how we think of him, it's important that we do, on occasion. Now I'm not suggesting that we obsess or even devote a lot of time to it but do realize, there is an antagonistic force out there in the world. Working to sow destruction.

1 Corinthians 7:5 – *“Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”* **1 John 3:8** – *“The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.”* **James 4:7** – *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”* **1 Peter 5:8-8** – *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

CS Lewis once remarked that perhaps the devil's greatest con was that people think of him like a comic book character. It's easy to dismiss a comic book character. But the Word of God? NO, the Word clearly reports there is an enemy, has been at work since the Garden of Eden, tempting us, testing us, torturing us by throwing

weed seeds into the fertile soil of God's kingdom. If our first lesson to be gleaned from this parable is "BE PATIENT" then the second is surely, BE ALERT!"

How do you stay alert? The usual remedies apply – prayer, scripture reading, confession of sin, repentance, talking with other people about what's really going on in your life.

The third lesson we can draw from the parable of the weeds is to be humble. There is a strong element of non-judgmentalism baked into this particular parable. Notice that the harvesters want to pull up the weeds as soon as they're seen. That isn't our job.

As many of you know, I lost a KAIROS brother this year. His name was Shae Rathbun. Shey was a tremendous guy I met though Kairos...

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.