

Matthew 13:24-30

The Wheat and the Tares

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This summer our worship theme is The Parables of Jesus. There is a lot we don't know about Jesus, but one thing we do know is that he was a terrific storyteller. He often sank down on the grass with his disciples around him and told them stories. He stood at the base of a hill in the afternoon or early summer's evening and told stories. When the crowd got too big he sat in a boat and talked to them. The people enjoyed his stories. They listened to the details and pondered what he was saying to them. They debated about these cryptic tales and argued about the meaning of the stories. These stories, though simple, are multi-layered. They draw us in. They make us think. As we turn the parables over in our own minds, like stones tumbling in polisher, we refine our faith in the process.

Parables have the ability to help us see things through the story that we may be blind to otherwise. Parables take us in. They show us things – things that are already there- but things we cannot see easily all by ourselves. Today our parable is about the wheat and the tares. Jesus tells of a man who planted his field with wheat seeds. Then in the evening an enemy came and planted this field with weeds. When the seeds germinated and began to sprout the servants came to the man to report that there were weeds all through the crop of wheat. The servants suggested that the man pull out everything, go through the field taking all the plants up out of the ground. But the man refused and decided to wait until the harvest when he could reap all that was growing in his field and then winnow the wheat from the tares.

What is Jesus saying in this parable and what does it mean for our lives today?

In the first place life is unpredictable. The parable says that the man planted a field with good seed and then he went to sleep, satisfied that he had done his best. He watched his seeds, checked the weather, said a prayer for rain. Having done his best, he had every reason to expect that, God-willing, a good crop would come and he could grind it into flour and his family could have food. Low and behold, within a few weeks the seeds germinated, and started to poke up through the soil. While the servants were looking at the short wheat grass, they realized something had gone awry. The sprouts were not uniform. Upon closer examination, the servants realized that somehow despite all their efforts there were weeds everywhere. Weeds? Where did they come from? How did our perfect field get like this?

I talked to a master gardener one day about her garden. She had beautiful flowers, mostly perennials, and her sense of style and color really inspired me. I assumed that once she had done her best, she could relax, but she complained about how much work it was. She assured me that she spent a lot of time every year. Weeds are clever. They insinuate themselves in the roots of some plants. They blow in on the breeze. They thrive everywhere. It is a constant battle.

I love the way Jesus says an enemy came in the night and planted weeds. It feels like that. If only it were that simple. Then we would know who to blame. But weeds in life don't even need to be planted. They just come with the territory.

Most of us start out planting the gardens of our lives with high hopes. We buy our homes. We save and plan ahead. We prepare our beds and fields with care. We invest in the good seed. Whether it is enemies who sneak in at night or just bad luck, sometimes despite our best plans, things go wrong.

You plan your career. You are ambitious. You never leave one job before you have another so there are no gaps in your resume. But then a worldwide recession comes along, and all the job loyalty you were banking on means very little in this new economy.

We all expect to stay healthy. We eat the right food, and exercise. We expect to grow old. But some of us wake up one morning to the news that we need medical tests and then more tests. Things are not right. I meet every week with a group of people in my cancer support group that are part of a group they never wanted to join.

If our main crop is raising a family, it all starts like planting perfect seed. When you hold your newborn in your arms each little finger so perfectly formed, most of us sink into the haze of wonder. Life is fairly bursting with potential. But as time goes on, we come to see that this crop while full of potential, is not perfect. It is a shock when we hoped to have a perfect crop to show for all efforts. One child may be wonderful, but he also shows signs of impulsivity, and has a temper just like Uncle Earl. Another child inherited the family gift for art, but she also gets a little depressed from time to time just like grandma. One child is brilliant but he lacks social skills. Each one is a mixed bag, and that is part of life. The minute we see that life is messy and that even with all our efforts we cannot change this truth, is the minute we take a big step toward wisdom. The wheat and the tares grow together.

In the [Harvard Magazine](#) this week the cover story is about compromise. The author writes about the Congress and how our form of government works best when people are willing to make compromises in order to pass legislation. Compromise means that no one gets all that they want. The legislation is a mixed bag, but it has enough variety to win the approval of a majority of the Congress. Compromise is messy. But without it, then nothing happens. Not much legislation gets passed.

Life is messy. That is a fact of life. It may not be all bad.

In the second place, Jesus says, you have to be patient. In the story the servants tell the man to pull up all the wheat when they find the weeds. But the man is wiser than this. He decides to wait. Let the wheat and tares grow together. It takes patience to live with a field which is not right. You have to be

patient, because you hope you can winnow it all at the harvest, but you have to wait and see. Without patience, you destroy your whole crop.

It is the impatient part of us that want to rip out everything and start over. It takes a lot of patience to live with things that are not right but to wait, to bide your time, to think about the greater good. The bible teaches us to be patient in life. That is not easy. In Psalm 4 the writer says, when you are disturbed don't act right away. Be silent; ponder things on your bed, and be patient. (Psalm 4:4) In Psalm 40 the writer explains "I waited patiently for the Lord. God inclined his ear to me and heard my prayer. God put a new song in my heart." Again and again the Bible declares that there is a great reward for patience. Proverbs gives advice to the faithful. A fool is hasty, but a wise person takes time to persevere. It is not easy to wait for things to change.

Be patient.

Finally, Jesus came to teach us about the kingdom of God. We are so lost in the weeds. We don't get what he has said. We don't get it on so many counts.

1. First we think that Jesus said heaven is a place you go to.
2. We think heaven is in the sky.
3. We imagine that heaven is something you have to attain- when it is always a gift, a grace. A state of mind.
4. We think that heaven is perfect in some idealized way that meets our criteria.

Jesus came teaching but we are still trying to learn what he said. Heaven is not a place. It is a state of mind. It is not a status you earn. It is a grace which is given. It is not a state you attain, but a sense of peace which comes and goes throughout your life.

I envy all of you who are going on this mission trip. You help other people, but usually in the process you have a chance to walk in their shoes, listen to their stories and experience their lives for a week. One of the interesting things about this mission trip is that you are going to an area of the country where people have had to live for almost a year after the devastating storm, while things were not right. The people you work with did not have a lot of choices about being patient. It has always been my experience on the 3 youth mission trips I have enjoyed that there are some sweet moments of wonder, when you know you are on holy ground. Sometimes it is helping others. Sometimes it is at evening check-in. Sometimes it is at meals or in the vans.

Jesus says that God's kingdom breaks in- when we least expect it. My brother is here today. On Friday I drove to New Haven to hear him sing in a concert at the Yale international Choral Festival. The concert featured the 42 singers from the chorus Joyful Noise- a group of singers with a variety of abilities. Music has changed their lives. One man sang a solo from his wheelchair that brought the house down. They sing from the heart, and when you hear them you know that God has brought them together. You know that they have come to teach us about God's kingdom, and where to find it and what it looks like.