

July 19, 2026
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Pentecost 8
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“Getting Into the Weeds”

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

It was not unusual for my home congregation to be mentioned in our local newspaper. In addition to the weekly worship information that The Courier-News ran for churches and synagogues for free, there would often be articles about special events at St. Peter’s that might include Rally Day, Vacation Bible School, the Sunday School Christmas program, and on one occasion the ordination of a certain son of the congregation. But one article that the newspaper ran was not something that anyone in the church or community had expected or welcomed: it was about an incident in the church’s vegetable garden in which produce was grown and donated to the local food bank. Parishioners with green thumbs had grown many wonderful vegetables that fed many people in our community; but one day, it was discovered that someone from outside the congregation had come into the garden and sown a very different kind of seed, seeds that grew into a weed that was most surprising to find in a church garden. The “weed” was marijuana, and the fact that it had been found on the property of a church made headlines not only in our local newspaper but throughout the state. It was quickly pulled up, but a reminder that intrusive weeds can be found among the plants that are meant to feed and nourish the people for whom they are grown and need to be dealt with lest they choke the good plants and result in a failed harvest.

Weeding is one of the most important and least favourite tasks of any gardener or landscaper. I often see people in their yards and gardens on their knees pulling the weeds that always seem to appear out of nowhere in the gardens that they have carefully planted and tended. I remember seeing my father in his gardens pulling weeds and mumbling words under his breath that I could not hear but can imagine how they sounded, since no one enjoys dealing with weeds among the plants that are meant to be a blessing and source of both nourishment and enjoyment. Weeding may be necessary, but no one would call it enjoyable!

Many of Jesus’ parables are set in the agricultural setting with which his audiences would have been very familiar. Last week, we heard his Parable of the Sower, a common sight in which a person sows seeds that land in a variety of conditions.

Another parable in Matthew's Gospel centers on a mustard seed, which Jesus describes as "*the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches*" (Matthew 13:32). Today's parable is once again set in the time of sowing seeds, Jesus' means of teaching the meaning of "the kingdom of heaven" that he has come to proclaim. Like the Parable of the Sower, in this story Jesus compares the heavenly kingdom to "*someone who sowed good seed in his field*" (13:24); but unlike the previous parable which centers on the fate of the sown seed, in this parable another sower comes into the field: "*but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.*" (13:25). The precise biological identification of "weeds" or "tares" (*zizania*) refers to a wheat-like weed common in the Ancient Near East. It was also referred to as "darnel," and Roman law specifically forbade the sabotaging of crops by planting this poisonous plant whose roots would become intertwined with the rest of the wheat crop. To remove darnel without damaging the wheat would be difficult, which is why the landowner in the parable instructs his servants to be careful in dealing with this invasive weed:

- "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 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.'" – 13:28-30.

Jesus' agricultural illustrations are known as *Mashal*, a narrative device that presents an allegory or extended metaphor for the sake of comparison: "*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field*" (13:24). The Hebrew term *Mashal* appears in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, in which God tells the prophet to "*speak an allegory to the house of Israel*" (Ezekiel 17:2). Jesus' parable echoes Ezekiel's description of one who "*took a seed from the land, placed it in fertile soil; a plant by abundant waters, he set it like a willow twig*" (17:5). While the darnel which the enemy had sown among the landowner's good seed could be very destructive, it did have one positive use: it could be burned for fuel. The landowner alludes to this when he tells the servants that the harvesters will "*collect the weeds first and bind them as bundles to be burned*" (13:30).

As with the Parable of the Sower, Jesus offers an interpretation of this parable to his followers: "*Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field'*" (13:36). As the disciples are taken into the house where Jesus offers his explanation to them, readers of this Gospel are also given the opportunity to hear Jesus'

explanation and are therefore implicitly included in the “in-group” of disciples. Both the disciples and the readers understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God, the ultimate meaning of the world and its destiny which affect all, but is “known” only to those who receive Jesus as their teacher. This portrays *“the situation of the church as the community who are privileged to be accompanied by the exalted Lord through their historical sojourn toward the coming of the kingdom oat the last day.”* (M. Eugene Boring). What follows is a *nimshal*, an explanation of the preceding illustration similar to a *nimshal* offered in rabbinic literature to a parable in Ecclesiastes: *“Sweet is the sleep of labourers, whether they eat little or much, but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep”* (Ecclesiastes 5:12). As the rabbinic *nimshal* identifies the planter as God and the orchard as the world, Jesus explains that the sower is the Son of Man and the harvested field represents the end of the age: *“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom”* (13:37-38). The “Son of Man” is both the historical Jesus and the Exalted One who will accompany the church through its history and the one who will judge both the world and the church in the end (*“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”* – Nicene Creed).

While the disciples are the “good seed” sown by the Son of Man, Jesus explains the presence of the weeds that were sown among the wheat as *“the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil”* (13:38-39). The parable shows that even though the kingdom is dawning in the world, the wicked and the faithful will coexist until the final judgment. As the faithful are the result of the “sowing” of the Son of Man, unbelievers and opponents are the result of the activity of Satan. Matthew’s dualistic perspective appears as a conflict of kingdoms: the kingdom of this world vs. the kingdom of God, seen in the devil’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness in which the Evil One offers Jesus *“all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour ... if you will fall down and worship me”* (4:8-9). The admonition to forego efforts to root out the “weeds” corresponds to a later instruction to his disciples with regard to the Pharisees:

- “Then the disciples approached him and said, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?’ He answered, ‘Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides leading the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.’” – 15:12-14.

As the landowner warned his servants not to uproot the darnel that was choking the wheat in this field, Jesus disciples are not to try to uproot that which has been sown

by the Evil One, but to leave them be. Separation of authentic members of the covenant community from false disciples is God's business and must await judgment at the end of time. Like weeds among the wheat, the wicked may not be easily distinguished from the faithful. But at harvest time, the judgment at the end of the age, *"the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers"* (13:41), those who have caused others to sin and have been evildoers. The children of the kingdom will be vindicated, and the wicked will face a severe judgment: *"they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (13:42). This "furnace of fire" is an allusion to the burning trash heap outside of Jerusalem called "Gehenna," which was a common image of hell (*"But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."* – 5:22). It is in the hellfire that the wicked will experience *"weeping and gnashing of teeth,"* an image Jesus earlier used to describe unfaithful Israelites being expelled from the kingdom (*"... while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* – 8:12). This phrase will appear in five additional parables in Matthew, highlighting the Gospel's emphasis on the parables as pictures of eschatological judgment, focusing especially on the fate of the condemned. Its usage is not meant as *"glee over the fate of outsiders, but a warning to insiders"* (Boring). While those who have not been faithful will be subject to such fiery judgment, *"the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (13:43). In Matthew's Gospel, the "righteous" are those who enact the love of God and neighbour as specified in Torah and Jesus' interpretation of it (*"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* – 5:20).

- "The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds provides a behavioural pattern for Christ-followers based on the biblical principles that Jesus deems most important: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart' and 'love your neighbour as yourself' ... In the language of Matthew's parable, attention to God's will is the distinguishing feature of the 'good seed' in the sower's field that will blossom into everlasting wheat in the world to come." – Nicholas J. Schaser.

As he does with the Parable of the Sower, Jesus concludes this parable with the call to his disciples *"let anyone with ears listen!"* (13:43). This is a classic call to attention, urging his audience to listen beyond surface-level words and truly absorb the deeper spiritual meaning. Jesus frequently used this expression after sharing challenging parables to separate casual listeners from those genuinely seeking

wisdom: “*While everyone has physical ears, having ‘ears to hear’ meant having an open heart and a willingness to let His teachings transform your life.*” (Boring).

Jesus’ parable is a reminder to faithful Christians of every generation that our ministries of shining the light of Christ before others will always face opposition, that there will always be bad seeds sown among the good seeds of our Lord and that the weeds of opposition will always seek to choke the goodness of the Gospel message we are called to proclaim. There is the temptation to pull out those weeds among us as we pull weeds that are choking the good plants in our gardens; but as our Lord cautions his disciples not to be hasty in rooting out that which is evil among us lest we unintentionally cause harm to those seeking to do good, we have to be cautious in how we deal with the presence of opposition to the Gospel among us, knowing that ultimately the Lord will be the judge who will separate the wheat from the weeds so that the weeds are thrown into the furnace of fire while the good wheat of God’s righteousness will “*shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (13:43).

- “We cannot eliminate the wicked, because it often happens that some who go astray return. So we must bear with them, but not in such a manner that they rule over us, just as we cannot altogether avoid sin but must not let it become our master. Therefore we must practice God’s commandments and call the Lord’s Prayer to our aid, until we can fully lay hold on Christ the Lord and he has become the joy of our heart.” – Martin Luther, 1546.

Our call as God’s people is not to avoid the weeds or seek to eliminate them from our present, but to “get into the weeds,” to deal with the reality of evil that dwells among us by not letting it prevent us from proclaiming the Gospel and not letting it control us or choke off the abundance that God seeks from the proclamation of God’s Word. While the modern phrase “getting into the weeds” often has negative connotations of being overwhelmed by difficulties or preoccupied with details or complexities, for God’s people “getting into the weeds” means dealing with the world as it is, filled with both good and evil, so that the light of Christ might shine in the darkness of our present circumstances as we go forth in the assurance that the darkness will never overcome the light, that in the end our Lord will root out all that would prevent the good seed the Lord has sown from producing the abundance that our Lord desires for all people. We are called to “get into the weeds” with the hope that even those who have been affected by the negative influence of what has been sown among us may come to see the light and life that are ours in the good seed that is among us in God’s Holy Word.

St. Isidore of Pelusium, a fifth-century Egyptian scholar, offers an interesting explanation of the parable of the wheat and weeds that interprets it as an example of God's patience with sinners who eventually repent and become instruments in God's plan of salvation:

- “The sinners, represented by the weeds, are not immediately pulled up and burned in order to give them time to repent. God forbids the angels to gather up the evildoers, lest they uproot the good wheat together with the tares, that is, so that the sinner may not be cut off while in his mind there is yet the possibility of repentance.”

Pope Benedict XVI warned all Catholics to resist what he called “the temptation of impatience,” the temptation to “*insist on immediately finding great success and large numbers ... For the kingdom of God as well as for evangelization, the instrument and vehicle of the Kingdom of God, the parable is always valid.*” For those who seek to be faithful to Christ's call to share the seeds of God's love, it means that we need to “*leave up to God the when and how it will grow.*”

- Jesus provides salvation from sin so that saved people can demonstrate righteousness and arrive at their eternal destination ... The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds envisions saved believers living out their righteousness and entering into the kingdom of heaven.” – Schaser.

The “weed” that had been scattered in St. Peter's garden was eventually pulled up by the police, and thankfully those plants never found their way into that soil that was meant to grow food to feed our neighbours. There are times when the temptation to pull up the weeds that are threatening the viability of the good plants is great, but Jesus' parable reminds us that while we will need to “get into the weeds” to share the Gospel in a world filled with opposition to this good news that we must be patient lest in getting rid of the weeds we threaten the intention of the message of our faith, that God so loved the *world* – including the weeds – so that *everyone* – even those who seek to do harm to the Gospel of Jesus Christ – who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Let us get into the weeds so that even the weeds will come to know the light and life that are ours in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all!

Amen