

Sermon: Resisting the Need to Weed

7/19/2020

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week, I made a confession. I am tired...tired of doing yardwork and tired from doing yardwork. I have spent many nights and naptimes mowing, planting, gardening, and weeding. Yes, I am tired of yardwork, and would love nothing more than to never have to work on my yard again. So, naturally, after Bible study and fellowship, I went out and worked in the yard. First, I mowed, which revealed all of the weeds growing underneath and amongst the grass. Some of the weeds I picked by hand, while others I sprayed with a weed killer. Then I laid down some dirt. Finally, just when I thought I was done, I saw more weeds growing amongst the bricks leading up to our front door, so I pulled many of them as well. It was only then that I returned inside and opened up my Bible to today's Gospel lesson where, sure enough, it was another parable about yardwork. Last week, after reading and reflecting on "The Parable of the Sower," I joked that God must have a sense of humor. This week, after reading "The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat," I must admit that the joke is getting a little old, but that does not make its message any less important to hear.

In the parable, Jesus tells us of a person—a farmer, perhaps—who sowed good seed in their field. That night, while they and their slaves were sleeping, an enemy came and sowed bad seed among the good. The slaves, upon seeing the weeds that grew, went to their master and asked him how this happened. He responds by saying that an enemy planted them. He then goes on to tell them not to remove the weeds. You see, the weeds growing that day were likely bearded darnel. Below ground, bearded darnel roots surround the roots of nearby plants, taking their nutrients and water. Above ground, the weed looks nearly identical to wheat. They look so

similar, in fact, that the only way to truly distinguish between the two is to wait until after they seed, by which time their roots are so intertwined that pulling up one will almost certainly uproot the other. This is why the master told the slaves not to uproot the weeds; because their roots had become so intertwined that they had no choice but to wait until the harvest, when the reaper would come and cut it all down, and the good could finally be separated from the bad.

Now, the disciples knew that Jesus' words were more than just a bit of farming advice. He was teaching them about the kingdom of God. What exactly, though, they could not quite understand, so later that day, after the crowd had departed, they asked him to explain the parable's meaning. Jesus responded, "There will come a day when the children of the kingdom, the good seed sown by the Son of Man, are separated from the children of the devil. On that day, the heavenly angels will come and reap the harvest, throwing all that is bad into the fiery furnace and sending all those who are good to the kingdom." In many ways, Jesus' response sounds like something we might hear from a street preacher, proclaiming to those walking by that they must repent or perish, or that they must turn or burn. Yes, good and evil exist, and there will come a day when God holds everyone accountable, including us. But that does not mean that Jesus was preaching a message of hell and damnation, or that we should either.

What we and street preachers often fail to take into account is that in today's parable we are not just the wheat and the weeds. We are also the slaves asking our master, our Lord, if we should pull the weeds out. All too often, we feel the need to confront evil, to fight with it, to root it up, and to burn it up. We feel the need to separate the bad from the good, both in our communities and within our lives, without realizing just how difficult it can be to tell the two apart. Without realizing just how difficult it can be to tell where the weeds end and the wheat begins. Yes, each of us has been called to go out and spread the good news. When we judge

others, though, when we seek to take justice into our own hands rather than trust in God, we are moving beyond this call.

One of the things that today's parable teaches us, is that, whether we like it or not, we live in a world filled with wheat and weeds, dark and light. We live in a confusing, divided world where one person's dandelion is another person's yellow flower, where one person's peaceful protestor is another person's rioter, and where one person's best intentions are another person's headache. Matt Rawle, a fellow United Methodist pastor and Duke Divinity alum, once went on a short-term mission trip to the Appalachian foothills with a group of youth. They went to help a poor, rural family whose roof was damaged and leaking. While working on the roof, several of them noticed a busted fence. The family had chickens to keep in and foxes to keep out, so the youth quickly went to work. "An easy fix," they thought to themselves, as they began digging the hole for the first fencepost. Then water began shooting skyward. You see, they had struck the water line, leaving the family with a leaking roof, a busted fence, and now no water. All that the man of the house said after noticing all the commotion was "well."

It's not that our motives are bad. Like Matt and the youth that day, we usually have the best of intentions. We want to help fix things and make the world a better place, when what we really need to do is be patient and have faith. No, "The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat" is not a message about hell and damnation. It is a message about how we are supposed to live until that day comes. It is a call to spend each and every day striving to love God with our entire heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. It is a call to continue living in the midst of the field, hoping and praying that we are wheat, while never forgetting just how difficult it is to separate the good from the bad, both within our lives and the world around us. Until that day, wheat and weeds will remain everywhere and within everyone. And so, we have to be

patient and have faith that God knows when it is time for the harvest and that on that day we will see and experience God's justice and mercy.

I don't know about you, but today's parable speaks to me, and not just because I'm tired of doing yardwork and have a new excuse not to weed. It speaks to me because, even on my best days, when I feel the most like wheat, I know that there are still a few weeds in there. Weeds that I have tried to pull out, but can't no matter how hard I try. Their roots just won't let go. So I wait, I trust, I strive to love God and my neighbor, and I have faith that God will one day sort it out. And that maybe, just maybe, something good may even come out of it.

You see, no one wants bearded darnel in their field. It stops wheat from growing and spoils the resulting flour. That is why, back in Jesus' day, after the two were cut, they were taken to the threshing floor, the place where the grain was removed from the stalks, and separated. Slowly, painstakingly, grain by grain, women and children separated the now plump, golden brown wheat from the small, black darnel. And what did they do with the darnel? They took it, bundled it with the wheat stalks, and burned it as fuel for cooking and heating. Because in God's eyes, nothing is useless and no one, not even weeds, is beyond saving. Amen.