

Consider the Weeds  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43  
July 23, 2023  
First Presbyterian Church, Luling

I suspect you have had an experience in which you thought you were going to help make things better, but instead you only made things worse. This week, it was the vacuum cleaner, whose brush stopped spinning. No big deal, I thought. I'll take it apart. I unscrewed the two screws I could see and it didn't budge. I consulted YouTube. I got it apart and cleaned out and then, of course, I couldn't get it back together. I was just about ready to give up and order a new vacuum cleaner attachment, when I decided to consult another video, which finally showed me what I was doing wrong after I watched it three more times. But it was a frustrating half hour or so. It definitely got worse before it got better.

This happens with fix it projects and friendships and relationships and any number of things. We rush in to try to make something better and we only make it worse. We have good intentions, but lots of times, we mess up because we are trying to perform a job that is not really our job. I am not a vacuum cleaner repair person, for instance.

The slaves in this parable were about to make this same mistake, but they were smart enough to ask the landowner what they should do. The landowner himself had sowed wheat seed in his field, or had it done. Now stop just a minute, because you're probably imagining nice tidy rows of wheat waving in the wind. That's not how it worked. There generally wasn't a plow, certainly not a tractor. They scattered the seed over the field and it sprouted where it fell, not nice and tidy. Anyway, during the night, the owner's enemy came and scattered some weed seeds over the same field. I'm not sure about you, but weeds at my house seem to do enough seed-scattering all on their own and not need much help. The landowner knew it was the work of an enemy, and when the plants sprouted, weeds and wheat, all mixed up together not in tidy rows, it was hard to tell which was which. But the slaves asked the landowner if he wanted them to pull up the weeds. You see, they were trying to fix the situation, to improve the conditions for the wheat to grow. They had good intentions. The landowner stopped them. Just let the wheat and the weeds grow together. At harvest time, the reapers will separate them, burn the weeds, and harvest the wheat.

Though it can be hard to know from this distance, scholars think that Jesus was talking about a specific weed, one that looks much like wheat when they are

both immature plants. As they grow, and the wheat's head gets heavy with grain, it bows down. But the weed doesn't plump up with grain, so it is sticking up above the wheat. At the harvest time, it would be easy to see which is weed and which is wheat, and they could be separated without damaging the wheat.

In any case, the landowner says that separating the weeds and the wheat was not the slaves' job. By doing so, they would have made the situation worse, as they might have accidentally pulled up some of the wheat or damaged its roots. Wait for those whose role it is to separate wheat from weeds, and wait for the right time.

Later on the disciples ask Jesus to explain this parable. The field is the world, and the Son of Man has sown good seed in the world, but the evil one, the enemy, has sown weeds alongside the good seed. At harvest time, at the end of the age, the angels will reap the good wheat and burn the weeds in the fire.

The parable invites us to see where we are in it. It's tempting, oh so very tempting, to be the harvesters. We think we know which people are weeds, which people are wheat, which behaviors need to be rooted out and which cultivated. We are pretty certain who is good seed and who is evil. But. We aren't the harvesters.

It would be fine, then, if we were the slaves, the ones who are sure they can improve the quality of the crop and fix things and make them better. We can be entrusted, even at an early stage, to sort out good from evil. We will make things better and fix them and improve things. Not so fast there. Just as the slaves weren't asked to do that, neither are we. Not our calling. Not our task.

OK, then, let's be the landowner. He seems wise and patient and cautious. Certainly characteristics we would do well to imitate and cultivate in ourselves, but we aren't in charge of planting the field nor harvesting the weeds or the wheat.

So then we must be the weeds or the wheat. We must be good or evil, we'd prefer to be the good seed, growing into a nutritious crop of wheat. And those other people, the ones who do evil, who cheat and lie and steal and kill, they are the weeds. It's pretty clear that we must be the wheat.

Not so fast there either. What if it's a bit more complicated than that. What if we are the field itself? We know, with Paul, that we do the things we do not wish to do, and fail to do the things we wish we would do. We do evil. We are sinful. We are human beings, of course we are sinful and do evil things. We are also God's good creation, made in God's image and likeness, and we are capable of doing good things. We are wheat and weed, both seeds, mixed together in the

same person. Who can judge what is wheat and what is weed within us? Not us, only the harvester, only our judge. God's job is to determine what is weed and what is wheat, what should be cast away and what should be harvested and used in God's kingdom work. We fields have weeds and wheat both within us.

But the explanation of the parable says that the field is the world. It's been a rough week in the world; it always seems to have been a rough week. There's plenty of evil in the world, no doubt about that. Plenty of weeds that need to be pulled up so the wheat has a chance to grow. If we were in charge of things, we could take care of it. It's clear to me who is bad and who is good. And it is probably clear to you too. But figuring out which people or nations or groups are evil and which are good is not our job. Ever. We would definitely make things worse if we tried to do that. We have made things worse when we've tried to do that.

So what is a person to do? In the face of evil within our own hearts, in the face of evil in the world, what is a person to do? We desperately want to fix things, to make things better, to improve the situation because God knows we could use some improvement. We can be so desperate for good, for hope, for happiness, that we try to fix things by rooting out the weeds and burning them. But, as that's God's job and not ours, we make things worse when we do so. We do the hardest thing, which is wait. Wait for God's time.