

WEEDS AND WHEAT

Matthew 13:36-43

Now that it has gotten hotter and drier after our cool, wet spring, weeds become more prominent in our lawns. Since the bluegrass becomes dormant in the heat, the grass thins and weeds have a field day. Then there are the weeds in the garden. How do they get there? Even in cracks in the sidewalks, curbs, and parking lots, under pine trees and wrapped around shrubs, we find weeds. It is like the flood waters that seep through sandbag walls and under foundation. How does it get there?

Jesus uses the illustration of a man who has a field sown with barley wheat. After a while his servants realize that there are weeds growing among the wheat. The servants ask him, “How did the weeds get there?” The man tells them, “Our enemy did this.” The weeds were there. But how do they get rid of them?

Today we have chemicals called herbicides. Spray them on our cornfields, and the weeds are zapped. We end up with fields full of nothing but the crop—corn, beans, wheat. We even have chemicals now to spray on our gardens to kill weeds and not harm the vegetables. But in Jesus’ day to get rid of the weeds, you have to pull them out one by one. What complicated this even more is at the early stages a weed called darnel virtually identical in appearance to a young barley wheat sprout. If you pull up a weed, you also pull up the wheat.

Cancer is like that. There is one sure way to kill cancer—you kill the body it lives off. Treatments for cancer include surgery and chemo and radiation therapy. They involve trying to kill the cancer without harming the good cells. The problem is that the good cells so often are affected. Often the worst part for cancer patients is not the cancer, but the effects of the treatments. Many times the treatment leads to symptoms like a lowered resistance to infection, which kills the person. How do you treat the cancer without killing the patient? It is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater!

That is why the man in Jesus’ parable says, “Let the wheat and weeds grow together. Then at the harvest we will separate them.”

Jesus explains this parable by saying that God is the man who owns the field. The wheat are those who have faith. The weeds are those who reject God. God allows evil (the weeds) to go on existing. I can do a great job of getting rid of weeds with Roundup. It kills the weeds, the grass, everything! God could use His “Roundup” on the whole world, wiping out all the evil. That’s how you get rid of disease in a herd. You destroy all of the animals. That would make it a whole lot easier for God.

But God is not about easy. He’s about loving. The evil is all around the world. But it is also in us. Sin is a cancer we’ve put into our lives. For God to kill evil, He would have to destroy you and me. Instead, He lets the sin and evil go on so that we and others can grow as His people.

Jesus knew He would be betrayed by Judas. He knew Caiaphas and His other enemies would plot to kill Him. He could as God have stopped them. But He didn't. Why? So He could go to the cross to provide a way for all sinful people to be rescued from destruction.

We heard last week about the special difficulty of recovering from the flood. Unlike a tornado or fire, when a flood hits you have to wait for the water to subside to do anything. And a lot of the real damage is hidden. The actual cost of the damage takes more time and is less certain to evaluate. It makes it difficult to know where to start with the clean-up.

That is what Jesus is telling us about why there is still evil in this world. We might think that the answer is to go in and wipe out all evil. But where would we start?

God's way may not make sense to us. He seems too slow. But God doesn't do things our way. He does them according to love, not what we want. We see people starving to death in Africa. Why doesn't He feed them? We see people struggling to stay calm after a flood. Why did He let the floods happen? Why do we see people dying of cancer? Why doesn't He give us the master drug to eliminate cancer? But why do we want those kinds of answers? Is it because we really care about those who suffer or is it so that we don't have to feel uncomfortable seeing people in pain?

Many herbicides are actually growth hormones. When given at such a high dosage, they cause the plant to grow too quickly and kill itself. You may notice after grass has been treated by weed killer how the weeds curl up. It is because they grow too quickly.

God is patient. He knows it takes time to grow. If we did what we often want Him to do, then it would be like putting herbicide on plants. It would be too much for us. Instead, God waits so that we have to slow down and let His Word grow in us.

God's way calls us to wait. But as we wait, He wants us to do something. CFW Walther, the first president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod said this over 150 years ago:

Another major duty of a Synod that wants to be and remains an Evangelical Lutheran Synod is that it not seek its own glory, but only the glory of God, being intent not so much on its own growth, but rather the growth of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of souls. You see, dear brothers and sisters, we are assembled here not for our own sake. We are in the faith, and by this faith we hope to be saved! But there are still many millions who have no faith! This is why we are here—so that we might bring salvation to as many people as we possibly can, so that the sad situation in Christendom and the corruption of the poor, blind heathen might be remedied. Only for this reason does our gracious God allow Christians to live on earth, that they might bring others to the saving faith. Otherwise, God would immediately take a Christian to heaven as soon as he is converted.

We aren't here just to twiddle our thumbs until judgment comes and evil is destroyed. No, we are here to share our faith with those around us. It can be teaching English to an international. It can be befriending a lonely neighborhood widow. It can be praying with our children before bedtime. It can be inviting a friend to church. It can be working on a Habitat for Humanity project or writing a check to help Kebede or another mission project. It can be praying for others who don't know Jesus. In all these ways God uses us to let His Word come into peoples' lives so that they grow to become wheat in the harvest.

In a Bible class people were discussing, "Where Is God When It Hurts?" They were asking whether they are to bring people to God or bring God to them. They discovered that if we try to bring them to God, we are doing the impossible. Only God can do that. But we can bring God to them, because as Jesus lives in us, then when we reach out to people in love, Jesus is right there with us. That is why God waits, not to frustrate us, but to give us the time to help bring God to others.

When the barley wheat was harvested, the grain was cut, bundled and taken to a stone threshing floor. There it was trampled by work animals until the seed was separated from the stalks—and the weeds. On a windy day they threw up the trampled grain into the air. The wind blew away the "chaff", the stalks and the weeds and left the seeds on the floor, ready to be ground into flour.

On the last day all people will be threshed. Evil will be blown away like the chaff. But until then God waits so that you and me and others can sprout as His good seed. Until then we wait—and bring Him into the lives of others.