

“There Are Weeds in the Garden”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • September 29, 2013

These days it seems like the whole world is in turmoil. Last week a church in Pakistan was bombed by a group tied to the Taliban. It was the deadliest attack on Christians in the history of Pakistan, but it may not be the last. The group that claimed responsibility told Reuters News Service, “(The Christians) are the enemies of Islam, therefore we target them. We will continue our attacks on non-Muslims on Pakistani land.”

You are probably at least somewhat familiar with the situation in Syria, but you may not be aware that the rebels who are fighting there are targeting Christian churches and families. According to a Christian ministry leader there, “Everyday the Syrian Free Army shoots Christian, bombs our area. Now they are hanging Christians on crosses! We are crying out to God for this to stop.” Protests and persecutions are taking place in Nigeria and Tunisia and India and Egypt, the list goes on and on. In fact, there are more Christians persecuted for their faith today that at any time in history.

Even here in our own country, a country founded on the Bible, we are finding more and more that the Christian faith is under attack. For example, in 2011 the director of the National Cemetery in Houston banned any mention of God in graveside services. She claimed that she was merely following the government regulations. A few weeks ago a sports commentator was fired by a large television network because he had expressed his Christian beliefs last year while running for the Senate.

Besides persecution, we live in increasingly violent and lawless times. A man goes into the Navy Yard in Washington, DC and starts shooting people. Right here in our own city the news is filled with stories of

murders, robberies, gangs, drugs, you name it. We live in a troubling age.

But over and over again in the Gospels Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven has arrived. The first words Jesus speaks in Matthew are, “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Yet when we look around at our world and see the sad state of affairs we’re left scratching our heads. How can we say that the kingdom of heaven is here? It seems like there are plenty of people around who reject Christ. If the Kingdom of God is here, why is there so much evil?

Jesus faced the same situation during his time on earth, which is why he told these parables of the kingdom that we find here in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. In Christ, God himself was here on earth teaching and preaching and healing and yet there were lots of people who rejected him, to the point of having him executed.

Jesus said, “the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.” Once again, Jesus uses a situation that would have been very familiar to his hearers. He describes a man who plants a field of wheat. But as a form of revenge an enemy comes and plants weed seeds in the field as well. The weed is most likely darnel, also called tares, which looks very similar to wheat when it’s young. In fact, it’s virtually impossible to tell it apart from young wheat plants. But when it begins to produce the seed stalks it is plainly obvious which is which. So the man’s servants came rushing in to tell the master that his field was full of weeds.

Usually weeds are more of a nuisance than anything, although they compete with the desirable plants for water and nutrients, which can be a problem. But darnel is

actually poisonous and also quite bitter. So it can't get mixed in with the wheat grains when they grind it to make flour. If they try to pull the weeds before they develop the seed stalk, they will most likely pull up some of the wheat by mistake and if they wait until they can tell for sure, the roots will be entangled and they will damage the wheat. So they must wait until it's time to harvest the wheat. The man says, "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

Once again Jesus' disciples don't get it. So he explains that the field is the world and that he is the one who sows the good seed, which is the "sons of the kingdom." In other words, the good seed are those who truly trust in Jesus as Lord and savior. The weeds, then, are those people who oppose Jesus.

There are several things in this parable that are important for us today. First of all is that the kingdom of heaven does not come by force. Instead it comes quietly and gently, like a seed sprouting. God never forces himself on anyone. He has given each of us the ability to reject him. The second thing I want us to see is the reality of evil. There is a spiritual battle going on all around us. As Paul says in Ephesians 6, we don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against cosmic powers, against spiritual forces of evil. The good news is that we know how this battle ends. Satan's days are numbered. Christ has already won the victory and there is a day when he will return in judgment. Each one of us will have to stand before a holy, righteous judge and give an account of our lives, and let me tell you that none of us is good enough. It's only by the death and resurrection of Jesus applied to your life that you can stand before God and hear him say, "well done good and faithful servant."

That also means that ONLY God can judge. Notice that Jesus says that the wheat

and the tares will grow together until the harvest, that is until judgment day. We will have both good and evil in the world until Jesus returns. Where we get into trouble is trying to determine who is "wheat" and who are "weeds." That's the whole point here. They both look very much alike. If we, the servants, try to go pulling the weeds we will end up damaging some of the wheat. As we see in this story, Jesus is concerned that none of the wheat gets damaged. He protects his wheat. He protects us. Not that we are immune to pain or suffering but that in the end we are gathered with all the saints into the eternal kingdom. Know that Christ Jesus has a plan for you. As we read in Romans 8, "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So what about us? How does this apply to our lives today? One way is to realize that God has sown us among "weeds" so that we can be an influence. Plants can't change. A darnel weed cannot become edible wheat. But people can change. God is able to change hearts and to draw people to himself. People that we're tempted to think of as weeds. One of the reasons Jesus told this parable to his disciples is because they were uncomfortable with the people that were hanging around Jesus – tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers – weeds. But Jesus didn't send them away. Instead he took away their sins and changed them into devoted followers. If we're willing to let him he'll not only do the same for us but he'll use us to help others.

The other application of this parable in our lives is that each of us has a mixture of wheat and tares in our own lives. None of us is perfect and most of us are painfully aware of our sins. But Jesus says that at the end of the age the angels will come and gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin. On that day

there will be no more sin. We will finally be what God has declared us to be all along and we will spend eternity with Him. Until that day we live with the knowledge of how it will all turn out in the end.

Amen