

**Matthew 13:24-43**

<sup>24</sup>He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup>but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. <sup>26</sup>So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup>And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ <sup>28</sup>He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup>But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup>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.’”

<sup>36</sup>Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup>He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup>the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup>and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup>Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup>The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup>and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup>Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

*God of the harvest, as your Word finds its way into the soil of our being, lead us by your Holy Spirit into the way everlasting. Amen.*

Last week our lesson was a parable about God’s generosity presented through the image of a sower who scattered seed everywhere with no apparent care about where it fell; good soil or bad, it didn’t seem to matter. I concluded that each of us is a mix of different kinds of soil; some good, some not so good. As Mr. Rogers used to say, there is a little good in mostly bad people and a little bad in mostly good people. Yet the point is: God sows good seed in everyone.

This week we have another parable, this time it is focused on the kingdom of heaven (a.k.a. the kingdom of God). This parable is also set in an agricultural context. A landowner sowed good seed in his field, but later weed seeds were sown in the same field by an enemy. Good seed and bad sown in the same field; that’s the setup for the parable.

I have a hunch that most people who hear this parable will immediately wonder how the landowner is going to get rid of the

weeds, which seems like an obvious first order of business. We all know that weeds are not good for our gardens. They compete with what we have planted for the soil’s nutrients, and can take over a garden bed almost overnight. Besides everything else, they’re not very attractive.

But we must remember this is a parable, not a story to be taken literally. Thus this story is not about the struggle of weeding our gardens.

Of course the slaves in this story respond just as we would expect, asking their master if they should get to work pulling out the weeds. To their surprise and ours, the master responded something like this: ‘No; don’t be concerned for the weeds, they will be taken care of in due time. This is not your job. Let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest. Then at the harvest the Lord’s angels will take care of the weeds; it is not your job.

The harvest is the end of the age; the great consummation, the final bell, so to speak, when all will be settled as we come face to face with the master and author of life in the company of angels. Until the end of the age, the story isn’t finished. Before the time of harvest, the weeds and wheat are difficult to tell apart. In addition, even before the plants mature, the roots of each would be intertwined and impossible to separate without damaging some of the good crop before its time.

This parable speaks to our habit of making premature judgments about others. But I wonder, do we judge others so we can convince ourselves that we are not *that* bad? Or are we projecting our own faults upon others? When I am honest, I have to admit that the things I see in others that I’m quick to judge, are the very things in me I’d rather not admit to. Judging others is a way to ignore my own needs for correction and growth.

This parable proclaims that judging others is *not our job*. If that is true, then what is our job? Let me suggest that our job is to be the Church, the Body of Christ in this world, right here and right now. There is much to do to be the Church. But at least we can take

judging other people off the table; that should free up no small amount of time and energy!

Think about a time when you have experienced grace? Have you ever found yourself in a tight spot, or in an emergency and felt helpless? Have you ever been on the receiving end of assistance that came to you without asking? What did it feel like to receive love and care from a total stranger?

Do we deserve this kind of grace? Our lives are a gift of grace, and we did nothing to deserve it! Yes, our lives are pure grace. Being the church means that our job is to share and pass on that same grace.

Being the Church means making space for all who seek to be touched by the love of God, and it means *being* the love of God for our sisters and brothers no matter who they are, because God isn't finished with any of us yet, and we can't know what God has in mind for the stranger who comes to us seeking solace from the storms of life.

Shouldn't we – the Church – be the place where all are welcomed and loved just as Jesus welcomed and loved all those who came to him? Jesus dispensed redemption; could we not do the same? As the Church, our job is to model the kingdom on earth; *on earth as it is in heaven*.

Jesus' prayer – *that they may all be one* – is our call to work for redemption. If, on the other hand, we take up the mantel of judgment, we will unwittingly separate and divide. That's not our job. So what if we saw redemption as part of our work; the work of bringing together what has been separated?

For me, one of the most powerful stories about the damage and harm that can be done by judging others is found in the Gospel of John, chapter 8. A woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. (They didn't have hidden cameras back then, so I wonder how they caught her?) The scribes and Pharisees brought her to Jesus. They reminded Jesus that the penalty for adultery as prescribed in the Law of Moses was death by stoning.

Jesus heard them, and after a moment, he stood up and spoke: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." When they heard what Jesus said, they all went away one by one as the reality sunk in; Jesus was left alone with the woman. No one had condemned her. Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go on your way, and do not sin again." Jesus offered her forgiveness, and thus she was redeemed; her life was saved. It is in our power to forgive, and make redemption a reality; and that's our job!

In the parable of the weeds and wheat, the field is the world, which means the field is all of us; we are all a mix of weeds and good grain. As long as we are part of the human race we are imperfect beings, we are like that field with both good seed and weeds growing together. Each of us is a mix of saint and sinner.

In the case of the woman caught in the act of adultery, each of the men who brought her to Jesus were saint and sinner together, the woman was saint and sinner together as well. We must remember when we point our judging finger at someone else, there are 3 fingers pointing back at us. We are all a mix of saint and sinner.

Still, God sows good seed in us, and our job is to be the best soil we can be. Our job is to be the Church that models the kingdom of heaven on earth. Our job is to be the Church that seeks redemption, not division. Our job is to bear fruits of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Kindness, Forbearance, Charity, Generosity, Self-control, Mercy, Forgiveness, and Longsuffering.

The Church we are called to be will never be perfect, and we should thank God for that, because no one could stand us if we were! We are an imperfect church for imperfect people. We are starving pilgrims willing to show other starving pilgrims where we've found bread. And in that work we ourselves will discover the possibility of redemption.

Thanks be to God! Amen.