



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JULY 19, 2026

GENESIS 28:10-19A; PSALM 139:1-11, 22-23; ROMANS 8:12-25; MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

LIVING IN A MIXED GARDEN

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 [Jesus put before the crowd another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 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?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 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.' " 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." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"]

The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds – what a treat! More traditionally known as the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, the parable is literally sandwiched between several other parables of the kingdom.

Although we didn't hear them this morning, Jesus follows the parable of the wheat and weeds with two more parables in Matthew Chapter 13: the

parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast.

Welcoming branches, nesting birds, warm, leavened bread – these parables offer expansive, inviting kingdom images. But it seems the disciples' minds couldn't move past the reaper imagery of bundling and burning in the parable of the wheat and weeds.

I can't imagine why.

Today's gospel picks up again as Jesus departs from the crowds, and the disciples follow him into a house where they ask him to explain the wheat and the weeds. His explanation raises the temperature on the parable, as it were, with more graphic and unsettling images. It must've been nightmare fodder for at least a few of the disciples: That now well-known fiery furnace, and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What do you think? How does Jesus' explanation sit with you?

This parable exists only in Matthew, but it has a familiar resonance. It sounds like a sorting allegory for the final reckoning. This theme appears more than once in Matthew. God will separate the wheat from the weeds, the sheep from the goats – the good from the bad – at least eventually, but when it happens, it will happen with a fiery finality.

It's not a comfortable parable. It unsettles us, makes us squirm a bit.

That's what the parable is supposed to do. The heart of any parable isn't so much about what it means as it's about what it can do. It works on us. Not once but repeatedly, over time.

Let me be clear – Jesus' interpretation of the parable includes the decisive assurance that evil and corruption have a shelf life. They will fully and finally expire. The injustices and inequities of this world will be righted once and for all. Make no mistake about it. This is news we need to hear, even as we faithfully seek to combat injustice and inequality in our own time.

But maybe we can set aside the temptation to contain the parable by trying to shoe-horn it into a tidy theological framework—a closed dogma for the final reckoning. That's just that kind of dualistic thinking that Jesus is trying to disrupt with the parable.

Maybe it's enough to recognize that the harvest he alludes to is almost certainly not on *our* immediate horizon. Every single end-of-the-world prophet so far has been dead wrong, including a few of our favorite New Testament saints.

No, leave that to God. We are called to live right here, right now.

Our shared vocation is faithful discipleship, even and especially in a world inextricably embedded with both wheat and weeds. And the instruction is clear: let the weeds grow with the

wheat. Don't try to uproot them before their time is up.

As I've said, this doesn't mean we don't stand up to evil and injustice. But we are invited to consider a more nuanced view of how we relate to sin and evil in our own time.

We are called to live in a mixed garden, at least for now. It is not for us to worry about who is out and who is in. Because guess what, the mixed garden is within us, too. We are, all of us, both wheat and weeds.

If you feel certain that you are solidly in camp wheat, take a closer look at the weeds growing at your edges. We all have aspects of ourselves that ensnare us, trip us up, and choke out our fruitfulness.

But here's the good news about having both wheat and weeds within us. God isn't only involved with our "wheaty" successes. Our weed-choked sufferings and failures are the very patches of our mixed garden where God's grace flows most freely.

I trust all of you have some sense of what I mean.

I've had seasons where I've really mucked things up and hurt more than a

few people – including myself. This was especially true when I was an active alcoholic. It was in my lowest low – one of them, anyway – that I was finally given eyes to see God's grace welling up around me in the midst of my wreckage and desolation. It was my patient, non-reactive Alcoholics Anonymous community who took my hand, and, guided by my Higher Power and theirs, they helped me take those first shaky steps into a journey of transformation that is still underway. Imperfect, of course, but still underway.

I pray I never lose sight of the loving community that knew enough to leave my weeds alone and hold their attention on me. They offered me just enough spiritual water and sunlight to see the sky again. I wasn't judged, I was helped.

It was the tangle of weeds in my shambles of a garden that, if you'll permit me to take the analogy just one step further and three gospels over, rattled my wheat enough to knock a grain or two off their stalks. You know the rest.

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."¹

¹ John 12:24 (NRSV)

Even weeds sown in the earth by the so-called evil one have a role to play in our fruitfulness. They contribute to the continuous cycle of death and resurrection that is our life in Christ. The fruitful harvest we bring to the world now is the true harvest we're called to attend to.

Paul tells us in our reading from Romans that "[T]he whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now."²

The whole of creation.

All of creation is under God's control and, by the power of the Spirit, is moving in a Godward direction.

My friends, that includes those pesky weeds.

We may naturally gravitate to the kingdom images in the parable of the mustard seed or the parable of the baker and her leavened bread. But the parable of the wheat and weeds is just as

much good news. It is for us, not against us. Both its hopeful assurances and its unsettling challenges serve us in our call to follow Christ.

At the end of the day, as we dwell in our mixed and imperfect garden, it's good to remember to look up at the sky from time to time. Draw in a deep breath and slowly exhale.

While we're attending to our lives in a tangle of wheat and weeds, our sunlight, our water, our nourishment, – the very air we breathe – it all comes from above. We can be sure in the knowledge that we don't – we can't tend to our patch of mixed garden alone. We have a gardener, too, and our gardener is Jesus Christ.

Amen.



² Romans 8:22b (NRSV)