

Sermon 7th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11), Yr. A @ St Johns – 19/7/20
“Wheat and Weeds” [Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43]
- Pastor André Meyer

Text... Pray: Heavenly Father, fill us with your Holy Spirit and open our hearts to your Word for us today, through your Son Jesus Christ, Amen.

Last week we heard Jesus teach about planting seeds (Matt. 13:1-9,18-23), and this week He shares about pulling weeds. If we have a garden, we all know that it's important to control the weeds, otherwise, we can forget which plants should be there and which ones shouldn't!

On a much larger scale we know that farmers also have to control weeds. Generally, after seeding, farmers spray the soil so that weeds won't grow together with their precious crops. Eradicating weeds is an essential farming technique so that the plants you are seeking to grow get the best chance they can to feed on the nutrients in the soil without being starved out by any competition.

As we know, Jesus loved to speak in parables. He spoke them plainly yet they were packed with meaning to those who lived off the land. His parable of the wheat and the weeds is no exception and it all seems pretty straight forward doesn't it? Let's recap... We know that the good seed is sown by the Son of God. He is the One who sows the gift of salvation, forgiveness of sins and eternal life into our lives which are all received by faith. We know that God continually feeds and grows those Gospel seeds in our hearts through His means: through the preaching and teaching of His Word; through the Good News of His Son; through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion; through the forgiveness of sins; through the fellowship of the Baptised, prayer, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. And, the Son continually sows *us*, sons and daughters of God's kingdom, His precious 'good seed,' out into His field.

The field into which we are sown is the world we live in. God's Baptised children are scattered across His world, but, we hear that the enemy is also sowing his kind of seeds as well. The intruder has been subtle, and the fruit of his labour isn't going to be seen until the plants *ripen* and literally '*bear fruit.*' Before this time though, they all look the same.

Now, to understand Jesus' meaning we need to know a little more. In ancient times, sowing weeds into a neighbour's field was a common way for rival farmers to 'get even' with one another. If farmers were at odds or wanted to get 'payback'

they would throw weed seeds into an enemy's crop at night. It even got so out of hand in the first century that Roman authorities passed a law against it.

These 'weeds' Jesus mentions have a name, "*darnel*" (*Lolium temulentum*), and even today, they're a problem worldwide. Early on when darnel shoots are young they look much the same as the dark green shoots of wheat. So, farmers didn't know they had weeds in their crop until the heads of grain appeared, and by then, it was too late. At that stage it is impossible to separate the darnel from the wheat because the roots of the two plants are so intertwined that to pull up one would uproot the other. Although, when it ripens, darnel bears black, inedible and poisonous seeds, and, if ingested will cause dizziness, slurred speech, convulsions, vomiting and diarrhoea. So at some point there had to be a separation between what was considered 'good' and what was 'bad.' That's why the Romans made sowing to ruin another's crop a crime, because these noxious weeds are very difficult to get rid of, and it put the health of citizens at risk.

How frustrating it would have been for the farmer who had put in many hours (*and days!*) into preparing and sowing good seed only to find weeds overtaking their precious crop of wheat months later! Good seed and a pure crop are valuable to a farmer, and also then, to consumers. No wonder the Master's servants in the parable are so concerned about getting rid of the weeds before the harvest.

Now it's fair to say that there are weeds all around us, and we simply can't control them all, no matter how hard we may try. But in another sense, there are *weeds* to deal with in our own lives as well. *We all* have *our* own personal 'weeds' that need attention – things in our lives that choke the growth of the good wheat, and so, *those* weeds need our attention. In fact, there's no need to look for 'weeds' in the lives of others, just look in *our own* garden, and it will keep us busy enough.

Now, although Jesus' parable seems to speak clearly about the wheat and the weeds and who they are, there's a question remaining to be answered... *Who* or what is the real enemy or threat to the growth of the wheat in the parable? Well, in one sense the enemy's clear: it's the evil one, the devil, Satan, the accuser of God's people, the slanderer ...but there is *another*. ...If we look closely, the central problem in the parable is *not* the weeds and wheat, but the *impatience* of the servants who hold the assumption that they knew *exactly* what their lord and Master wished.

It's no surprise that we love to eradicate weeds to keep our gardens in order, and so too do these servants. But their impatience to deal with the weeds would in fact have had worse consequences than those of the "*enemy*"! Granted, the weeds probably reduced some of the wheat's fruit-bearing potential, but they didn't destroy the good wheat itself. The enemy's actions created an inconvenience for the Master; but even *with* the weeds in the field, he would still receive a good harvest. However, if the well-meaning servants had pulled out the weeds as they wanted, they would have destroyed the good wheat as well. As a result, there would have been no fruit for their lord if they had their way. In their eagerness to please him, they would have obliterated the *whole* harvest! The servants could easily have become more destructive "*enemies*" than the true enemy himself!

So then, although the weeds *are* an issue, it is not a problem that we then as the Master's servants are going to solve – especially if the field is "*the world.*" Because the plants look the same, when it comes to 'weeding out' people, often we don't have the proper perspective, knowledge or understanding to determine the good from the bad: only God truly sees the heart. Remember, the weeds aren't the big problem, rather, it is the impatience of the servants which is highlighted.

These servants think they know what their lord wants; but their actions would have been more destructive than the actual weeds themselves. God's "*harvest*" will take place in *His* good time, and not ours. In the parable, the proper response of God's servants is to wait patiently for His harvest to ripen. Congregations have been torn apart by members crusading to purify the church or pushing their agendas upon others, rather than working carefully together as a whole. Some even have the best of intentions and believe they're doing what God wants. So too, mind you, did the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They considered Jesus and His followers as 'weeds.' The lesson is clear: those *too willing* to be 'weeders' can easily make the wrong judgments as they put themselves in the place reserved *only* for the Master.

Judgmental attitudes towards others is a prime indication that one's thoughts and actions have been influenced subtly by the "*enemy*" rather than by God and His gracious love. Remember, Jesus didn't 'weed out' Judas from The Twelve, even though Jesus knew about his betrayal before it occurred. Nor did Jesus 'weed out' Peter, even though He knew Peter would deny knowing Him. What about Zacchaeus the despised tax-collector, or the thief on the cross next to Jesus? Jesus even knew that all of His disciples would run away in fear when He was arrested – so they were all "bad" followers, but He didn't 'weed them out' of His favour. If

Jesus were to 'weed out' *all* the imperfections from the unripened crop, *who* would be left?

The problem of the 'weedy' sinful nature of human hearts is one that God deals graciously with through the death and resurrection of His Son. God deals with evil and sin in the world, *and* in each of us, in His own unique way. He gets to the root of the problem and pays the price for it Himself. God does all the work when it comes to dealing with 'weeds': whether it's in the Church, in society, the world, *or, in us*. We can't even eradicate evil within *ourselves*, let alone in others – no matter how hard we try. Only God can do this patient and tireless work, and He takes a lifetime to grow His crop so it becomes ripe for harvest. He is so very patient when it comes to His masterpieces – and so too, His plan of salvation through His Son.

The servants of God, our Master, can't assume that they always know what He wants. It may be impossible for us to distinguish the weeds from the wheat or the children of the kingdom from the children of the evil one along the way. By judging people to be "weeds" and seeking to 'weed' them out, we may be *undoing* all of God's good work, and so, destroy the potential fruit God has planned in the future. We are truly both wheat and weeds; 'we are saint and sinner at the same time' reminds brother Luther.

The Master is continuing to do His good work of growing His good wheat even as it stands among and within the weeds. So, let God be the One who decides who stands and who falls when the time for harvest comes. Let us instead know the grace of our Saviour who covers over and deals with our 'weedy hearts' by His blood. Let us seek to faithfully attend to the Master's harvest before us instead.

Let us 'write no one off' as a lost cause, or worthless like a 'weed' for God doesn't 'write us off' in His love. Let us not be impatient servants. Instead, let us faithfully continue to sow the good seed of the Gospel into people's lives and lovingly tend to it so that it grows up healthy and strong in Christ. One day, when the contradiction of weeds and wheat growing together ends, and the separation takes place, God's abundant harvest will result in triumph and celebration, for His people will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Amen!