

"Obsessing Over Weeds; Celebrating Over Wheat"

Matthew 13:24-30

Catonsville Presbyterian Church, July 20, 2008

The Rev. Dr. W. Terry Schoener

I have a part of my lawn that vexes me, that never seems to grow properly; it always starts out looking wonderful in May and June, but by July, it is just looks terrible. In past years I've put a little bit of fertilizer on it, added more grass seed, watered it religiously, thinking something will happen -- it doesn't. Every year it's the same.

So this past spring, I thought, "This year, I'm going to manage this problem!" I rented a Roto-tiller, and plowed in some cow manure and some peat moss and then I went to the Garden Center and got their best grass seed, leveled the dirt and spread that premier seed.

And now I'm back at the Garden Center speaking to the manager, because my new lawn is full of crabgrass, the bane of suburban agronomy. I'm saying to him, "I've got to get rid of it!"

This scripture is a parable. Parables are not exactly illustrations.

Illustrations are simple and help us to see more clearly.

Parables often puzzle us and force us to ponder more deeply the mysteries.

This is a parable that tells about a farmer who plants good seed everywhere - an important point - he plants good seed everywhere in his field. But, the servants find weeds growing in the midst of that wheat.

I wonder if there is anyone of us who hasn't puzzled mightily over how ...

cruelty get mixed into love,
e-coli gets into the peppers,
hatred gets into religion,
drugs get into the schools,
how evil gets into the good creation.

We have a good God, we have a powerful God, who wills only good, plants only good seed, and yet, there are weeds.....

Al Quita among the Afghans;
Bombers in the airports;
Greed among the bankers;
Drugs among the Olympians;
Churches peppered with wheat and weeds.

(You know, everyone of us is a field in which weeds and wheat seem to be growing together.)

What is going on?

The earth is infested with terrorists, tyrants, haters, aggressors, disease, deformity, natural disasters, hunger, and the greedy.

Even God's house has members who don't live a Christian life.

How does this happen?

And so we start to call God into question: "Oh, God, you did sow good seed, didn't You?" - meaning "You aren't the source of evil, are you God?"

No, God isn't the source of evil!

Good seed: When Creation was finished God called it "Good."

And this creation is laced with is God's love attempting to embrace us.

The field is spread with grace, forgiveness, miracle,
life, purpose, joy God's good seed.

And God has cast this good seed everywhere, everywhere!
There is no time, no person, upon which good seed has not
fallen.
No nation, no religion, no person where God's good seed
hasn't been planted.
Even the Roman's cross could be the fertile ground for
salvation, and the tomb an incubator for resurrection.
Good seed everywhere!

So, what is the source of the weeds?

Jesus' answer given in this parable is, "*An enemy did this,
sowed weeds among the wheat.*"

The Bible sometimes calls them, "Tares."

Technical name is "Bearded Darnel."

It's a grass that looks a

lot like wheat when it first germinates, but it isn't wheat
– it's counterfeit.

I was once visiting with a man who had cancer,
bad cells among the good,
and we were talking about this story.

He said something that sticks with me when I
think of this parable:

He said life is so good that it must be from God, but
cancer cells among my normal ones is so insidious it
must be of Satan.

I think that's what Jesus is saying here: "*An enemy
did this.*"

Now, one of the things that I want you to notice in this parable,
which I think is easy to miss, is that the wheat is not threatened by

the weeds. Maybe we presume it is, but the wheat is not being crowded out by the weeds. The wheat is growing just fine. There is going to be a harvest; it's going to be an abundant harvest.

It is not the wheat that is threatened, but it is the servants of the farmer that have this great anxiety about the fact that there are weeds among the wheat.

The servants feel threatened. What is the threat? I don't know, but maybe it's the inconvenience, the difficult task that they are going to have eventually of sorting the weeds and the wheat.

They have a strong feeling about this mixed field, such a strong concern that (did you notice as this was read?) the weeds become their focus. They get focused on the weeds!

The story is about a farmer who plants good seed, wheat, everywhere in the field. That's the good news.

But these servants don't even talk to the farmer about that wheat.

These servants are so consumed by the fact that there are weeds mingled among the wheat that's all they notice. That's all they talked to the farmer about. Instead of congratulating him about the wheat

“The weeds! The weeds!” - they have anxiety about the weeds. They are obsessed with the weeds.

And so are we. There are so many good people in the world doing so many good things, but if you pick up a newspaper, all it wants to tell you about is the weeds. TV news wants to tell you about.....

the bad teens,
the gangs,

the terrorists,
failures in Iraq,
hurricanes,
floods,
disease,
and the pregnancies of unmarried movie stars.

It doesn't tell you about the many kids that come to this church and tens of thousands that go to other churches.

Media wants to tell you about a few bad eggs down at the Congress while there are thousands of wonderful men and women that are dedicated to serving our country.

A European journalist commenting on our “bad-news” media said, “If I consumed only American news I would be likely to commit suicide!”

So many good days in our lives (there will be bad days, of course) but we should not be consumed by the bad days; we need to remember how many good days there are.

There's wisdom in the phrase, “Count your blessings.” You have a wonderful church here, just filled with good people, but you know, sometimes, particularly the leadership of a church, can get obsessed with the people who are absent, and the people who are uninterested, and the people who are uninvested, the ones who are hypocritical
(Yikes! This list includes a lot of us!)

See, this is how the Enemy wins! The Enemy cannot destroy the wheat. The dark force, Satan plants the tares, the darnel, the weeds, but the weeds can't destroy the wheat; there's going to be a harvest.

The **first** way the Enemy wins is to get us, the servants, to become obsessed with the weeds, get focus away from the wheat and onto the weeds, get into crusades to rid the world of the weeds.

And when we get into such crusades, two things happen:

One thing is that the disciples want to rip up the weeds, tear 'em up, get 'em out of there. We may want to do it for good reason, but we may also end up doing the Enemy's work for him, destroying the field in which the wheat is planted.

Thereby the Enemy wins by the hands of the servants of God what he could not accomplish on his own.

Well-meaning but misguided Christians have burned witches.

Well-meaning but misguided Christians have shot abortion doctors.

Well-meaning but misguided Christians have destroyed candidates for high office.

Well-meaning but misguided Christians have pushed wayward children away.

And it's the Enemy who wins.

The point is, we can't be sure that we know how to distinguish between the weeds and the wheat, and sometimes what looks like a curse turns out to be a blessing. We don't have a very good record of sorting weeds from wheat.

The way the Enemy wins is to get us to try to tear up what we think are the weeds.

And the **second** way that the enemy wins is, well, heck, you know how we can get fixated on what we are against, not

what we are for? "I'm against that!" "Oh, yeah, what are you for?" "I don't know, but I'm against that!"

The glass is half empty, we don't see that it's half full.
The field is half weeds, we fail to see that the field is also half wheat, so we aren't thankful or joyful.
The church is half hypocrites - but it's also half disciples. We should shout, "*Hurrah! and Amen!*"

The Enemy wins when you get cynical, curmudgeonly, or anxious and become so obsessed with the weeds that you can't celebrate the wheat - the wheat is the miracle! Or as the first George Bush might say: "*It's the wheat, stupid!*"
We have to keep our eyes on the wheat it's the miracle that we're supposed to see in the parable.

"Master, shall we pull up the weeds?"

"No, in gathering them you will uproot the wheat as well. Let them both grow for now."

Yikes! Is the Bible lax on morality?

No, the Bible is full of admonitions that we should be clear about what is evil, we should oppose it, teach our children right from wrong.

It is the crusades, it is the

campaigns by moralists on the left wing – social righteousness by political correctness; and ...
the jihads on the right wing, folks want to prescribe for everyone the right way to live.

These will not make a uniform field.

They often bring tragedy by their uprooting methods.

Jesus teaches us that secondarily we should note and oppose evil. Secondarily! But we should not obsess on it. We are primarily called to proclaim ...
the good news of the wheat,

not the bad news of the weeds.

"But I'm a Christian and I see a lot of bad things!"

Sure! Anyone can see bad things. We're Christians, and we see what good things God is doing in the world, and we want to tell people about this good news.

Be confident that there will be a reaping in God's good time. The biblical imagery is, "God will send his reapers, his angels, to take the harvest home and to burn the weeds." That is: there will be a sorting that will take place because the universe is moral.

But for right now, the focus should be on the wheat, that God's sovereign rule is growing even among the weeds of life. Growing, GROWING. It grows!

God sows good grace;

the love of God is sown everywhere;

And the most powerful witness against evil, is ...

not a jihad to root weeds out,

but to celebrate the wheat,

to sing of what God is doing,

to share it with one another,

to take it to someone who is anxious about the weeds, and tell them about the wheat.

A life of joy among the weeds.

I said to the manager at the Garden Center, "Lookee here: I Roto-tilled, I fertilized, I planted your best seed, I watered it and now I have a lawn of half crabgrass; I've got to get rid of it now!"

And he said, "Well, I have a killer that you can put on it, but I want to

tell you that it kills most every thing else too. You're going to end up with some big yellow patches in your yard, and the crabgrass will grow again next year anyway.

My suggestion is that you don't obsess over the weeds. Enjoy the greenness of your yard this summer. Next spring, oh, about Easter time, I'll come and bring some of my men and we'll use my expertise to decide where to spread a crabgrass preventer."