

Good or Evil Seed? Wheat or weed?

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (CEV) The Parable of the weeds

Jesus then told them this story:

The kingdom of heaven is like what happened when a farmer scattered good seed in a field. But while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and scattered weed seeds in the field and then left.

When the plants came up and began to ripen, the farmer's servants could see the weeds. The servants came and asked, "Sir, didn't you scatter good seed in your field? Where did these weeds come from?"

"An enemy did this," he replied.

His servants then asked, "Do you want us to go out and pull up the weeds?"

"No!" he answered. "You might also pull up the wheat. Leave the weeds alone until harvest time. Then I'll tell my workers to gather the weeds and tie them up and burn them. But I'll have them store the wheat in my barn."

After Jesus left the crowd and went inside, his disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the story about the weeds in the wheat field."

Jesus answered:

The one who scattered the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seeds are the people who belong to the kingdom. The weed seeds are those who belong to the evil one, and the one who scattered them is the devil. The harvest is the end of time, and angels are the ones who bring in the harvest.

Weeds are gathered and burned. That's how it'll be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they'll gather from his kingdom everyone who does wrong or causes others to sin. Then he'll throw them into a flaming furnace, where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain. But everyone who has done right will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. If you have ears, pay attention!

Today's reading comes from Matthew 13. It follows the story of the sower which we thought about last week. We were reminded of the extravagant generosity of the sower, who sowed seed everywhere. So if we're beginning to think therefore God's salvation is universal this story could be a correction to that idea. There's a flaming furnace for the weeds but for the wheat they'll shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. In the end some people will be saved and others will be condemned.

I'm sure we're aware that if we take a text out of its context we're in danger of ending up with a con. Sometimes when we read the story of Jesus, in the Gospels, the context is more obvious than others.

In this case I'm wondering whether chapter 12 might shine a light on the parables in chapter 13. In chapter 12 Jesus finds himself in trouble with the Pharisees in relation to Sabbath Laws. His disciples pick and eat some grain on the Sabbath and therefore are accused of harvesting which is work and then Jesus 'works' by healing a man on the Sabbath.

Matthew tells us in chapter 12:14 that the Pharisees left and started making plans to kill Jesus. They're pretty seriously upset with Jesus. To them he certainly qualifies as a weed and they plan to weed him out of their field. They also accuse him of using evil powers to cast out evil. They see him as an evil weed doing untold damage to their cause. In their thinking to God's cause.

Matthew throws a quote from Isaiah 42 into the midst of the Pharisee's criticisms.

"Here is my servant whom I've chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight;
I'll put my Spirit on him, and he'll proclaim justice to the nations.
He won't quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he'll not break, and a smouldering wick he'll not snuff out,
till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope."

Clearly Jesus is the fulfilment of this prophecy. But does this have any bearing on the parable of the wheat and the weeds? In the parable there's a farmer who sowed good seed, an enemy who sowed evil weed seeds, and there are servants who notice the weeds and want to remove them. They want to weed them out.

Could it be that the servants in the story remind us of the Pharisees? Are the Pharisees in the business of weeding? Do they judge people and then plan to destroy those who are evil?

Are we like that? Do we look around our community and decide we'd be much better off without certain members of the community? Would we say, they're no good for our cause, they're evil, and they've got to go?

The farmer says, "Leave the weeds alone until harvest time." The word translated 'leave' is also regularly translated 'forgive'. It's the word used when Jesus says from the cross, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." And the word we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins."

Are we like the Pharisees or Jesus? When we see people who aren't measuring up to our idea of discipleship do we want to weed them out, to get rid of them? Or do we see them as bruised reeds or dimly burning wicks who need to be cared for and nurtured so they can grow strong?

This parable is a warning not to see ourselves as weeders in the garden of God. We're not in the business of judging and now's not the time.

Are we good seed or evil seed? When you look at me do you see a good seed or an evil seed? When you look at yourself which do you see? When I look at me I see a mixture - I can be good and I can be evil. It goes to the core of my being, I'm at the same time saint and sinner. I guess they're so entwined that to destroy the sinner will also destroy the saint.

The good news is that Jesus is in charge of the harvest. Jesus and his angels will gather the ones who belong to the kingdom of God and take them to heaven and will throw those who belong to the evil one into the furnace.

Jesus is in charge of our eternal destiny. Jesus who was sent to this world not to condemn us but to save us. Jesus who died on the cross so all who believe can live.

I have no hope outside of Jesus. We have no hope without Jesus.

So right now if we feel like we're like a reed that's so bent it's about to break or a wick that's only just smouldering then Jesus won't break us off or snuff us out but rather will love us into strength and help us burn so brightly we'll shine like the sun in our Father's kingdom.

Praise God for Jesus and his unfailing love and forgiveness.

Amen.

