

Is That A Weed? Mathew 13: 24-43

Before we spend some time together in the Scriptures, allow me a few moments to explain how I select what text to preach from on Sunday morning. Our Bible is not a book but an inspired collection of 66 books. It has 1189 chapters and 31,173 verses containing nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million words, and it is no easy task to discern what pastor and people may need to hear on any given Sunday. It is more important than ever for God's voice in the Scriptures to be heard loudly and clearly by God's people, as we live in an age where pop culture and media celebrities have a louder voice on moral and ethical issues than the preacher does on Sunday morning.

Though the temptation is certainly there, and some yield to it, preachers are not free to weigh in on the issues of the day to gain personal popularity or higher attendance numbers. Unlike celebrities and politicians, the goal of an evangelist is not publicity, fame, and recognition but to further the kingdom of heaven and bring about social change by allowing the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to soften hardened hearts. Even so, with recorded messages now being viewed by people outside of the immediate church family, there is risk that a pastor may be attacked by the cancel culture of our day.

Unlike the fire and brimstone preachers of old, there is now a tendency to avoid those troublesome texts that might be divisive or even unpleasant, and stick with those that are much easier on the ears. But as you have heard me say many times before, a pair of scissors is not a suitable Bible study tool. To prevent falling into the trap of telling you what I want you to hear instead of what God wants us to hear, something author D.A. Carson calls the "gagging of God", I use the Revised Common Lectionary as a guide in choosing our Scripture text for the message of the day. The lectionary is a three-year cycle or calendar of Scripture passages that allows us the opportunity to hear the voice of the writers of all the books of the Bible. For each Sunday of the year and special days on the church calendar, there is prescribed an OT passage, a passage from the Psalms, an epistle selection and a gospel reading. We are in year A, which centers around Mathew's Gospel. Year B contains Mark's Gospel and Year C that of Luke. Portions of John's Gospel are also mixed in so that over the three years we will have an opportunity to hear the voice of the writers of all the books of the Bible.

Lectionary or not, there may be times in which we may not find ourselves in total agreement on what the Bible teaches about a topic or issue. If that happens, I pray that our love for Jesus and our love for each other will allow us to continue to grow in our faith together as we learn from the Bible, from the Holy Spirit and from each other. We can rest assured that the problem lies not within the Scriptures but within us. Be We are not alone in our lack of knowledge, for we see from verse 36 the disciples were not the least bit ashamed to admit they did not understand what they had just heard Jesus say about the kingdom of heaven. Even though He spoke in parables, a literary device meant to make something difficult to understand easier to understand, the disciples and most likely the crowds remained confused that day. It was not until Jesus had left the crowds and went into the house that real learning took place. The principle holds true today. Those who are willing may learn more about Jesus at the dinner table or a small Bible study group than sitting in your pew on Sunday morning. Both are vitally important.

Today, we will begin at the end of our passage rather than the beginning. "Let anyone with ears listen". When we encounter these or similar words of Jesus in the Scriptures, it is a signal to slow down and pay close attention because something particularly important is in view. In this instance, it is information about weeds growing in the kingdom of heaven. How many of us realized that was even possible? It is no wonder the disciples were confused! The parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning) of the weeds involves wheat and weeds, good seed and bad seed, darkness and light and friends and enemies. Obviously, some of those things are less than heavenly. Once we slow down and think about what Jesus is teaching, we will soon discover that Jesus has more in mind than the heavenly realms we typically think of when we see or hear the phrase kingdom of heaven. With all the pain and heartache in this broken and bleeding world, it is easy for us to forget that **the kingdom of heaven is both there and later, wherever "there" is, and is also here and now.** Though they are not absolutely one and the same they are intimately related to each other.

The dilemma we face today is the earthly kingdom of heaven, which is the church, looks little different to the average person than the rest of the world. To put it in context with this parable of Jesus, the proverbial weeds have grown so tall it is hard for some folks to see the good plants that are still growing and bearing fruit in their midst.

The reason I mentioned the lectionary was to alleviate any concern you may have that I choose the passage of Scripture that we just heard to warn that there are weeds growing in the Millcreek Community Church. The fact is that we do not know each other well enough to even begin to make those kinds of assumptions and even if we did, we should not. I remember as a kid planting the garden with my dad and helping my mom plant flowers around the house. Weeks later, when it came time to hoe the garden, a chore I despised even to this day, I would ask the same question over and over. Is that a weed? **The truth is that good plants and bad weeds often look the same until they mature.** It takes a trained eye and much experience to recognize the difference. Sometimes what we consider to be a bad weed can look like something else to others. How many of us picked a bunch of yellow dandelions and gave them to a special person in our life?

Like it or not, the kingdom of heaven has weeds. When we hear things like that, the first thing we typically do is find someone to blame. Whose fault is it? Who cut corners and planted bad seed? Who failed to take care of the garden and let the weeds get out of control? We tell ourselves it could not have been us. After all Jesus reminded the disciples that it was the enemy- the devil who came and sowed weeds among the wheat. Notice that he seized the opportunity while people were asleep. There is a lesson there somewhere. Even so, aren't you happy to know that Jesus did not place the blame with the servants but with the one who planted the seeds?

The enemy is an expert at sowing seeds of untruth that grow into weeds of division and separation. I can almost see old Adam taking a nap and Satan taking advantage of the situation to entice Eve with his series of lies and half- truths. I guess we could blame all the weeds on Adam for sleeping while his wife Eve was giving in. But that does not do a thing to help us battle the weeds. Sin separates us from God and from each other and the evil one continues to nurture weeds of division and separation today. One thing is for sure, and that is that those weeds do not need an ounce of water or fertilizer from us to help them grow. We make it easy for him when we refuse to acknowledge our sinful and self-righteous ways. Is that a weed?

The kingdom of heaven has weeds. The question is what can we do about it? We can give in, tell ourselves the weeds are too many and too high and let them choke the life from us. Or we can learn to live with the weeds, perhaps even learn how to manage them, and continue to do the work of the kingdom that God has called us to do.

For followers of Jesus, the first choice is not an option. **The kingdom of heaven is not for quitters.** If you have doubts that is true, read the seven letters Jesus sent to the church in the early chapters of Revelation. Earlier in 7:13 Jesus tells us that the gate is narrow, and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. It is easy to quit. Other roads look so attractive, but they lead to destruction. Those that refuse to quit recognize the weeds of the parable for what they are. Jesus identifies them two ways in verse 41. He said they are “all causes of sin” and “law-breakers. The King James renders that word law-breakers as evil-doers. In chapter 7, Jesus refers to them as “workers of lawlessness”. You get the idea. Weeds are sinful things that will weaken our faith in Christ and our love for Him and each other. Weeds are people who consistently ignore or blatantly corrupt the inspired Word of God. The lists for both are long and sad.

Weeds include selfishness, greed, envy, prejudice, laziness, and complacency. Weeds can be hurtful words spoken in anger or allowing anger to escalate into violence. Weeds can masquerade as wheat, a hypocrite that says one thing and does another. Weeds are those who, to use a popular word today, “reimagine” Scripture to support a favorite social agenda or political platform. Like the weeds in the parable, they can become so intertwined with the good plants that we can pick them out, but we cannot pull them out. The best we can do is pray that God will transform them into something good before the harvest is ready. BTW, that is something God is really good at!

By many indications, that day is quickly approaching. The fields will soon be so great that Jesus will call in His helpers, holy angels, to gather the weeds from among the wheat. On that day, the angels will not need to ask, “is that a weed?” for they will be easily identifiable by their works. Once the angels work is complete, there will no longer be any weeds in the kingdom of heaven. The workers of evil will no longer be among the workers of good. The kingdom of heaven on earth, the church, will be fully and completely transformed into the kingdom of heaven, the church, in heaven, the place where Jesus says the righteous will shine like the sun in glory. Praise God, on that day never again will we ask “is that a weed?” Amen