

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 13:24-30

*Pew Bible N.T. pg. 14*

<sup>24</sup> He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while everybody was asleep an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup> 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?’ <sup>28</sup> He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup> But he replied, ‘No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> 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.’ ”

**Scripture Lesson:** Matthew 13:36-43

*Pew Bible N.T. pg. 14*

<sup>36</sup> 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.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup> the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup> and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears, listen!

**Response to the Word**

L: This is the Word of God for the people of God

**P: Thanks be to God!**

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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“On Using Good Judgement”

Rev. Amy Terhune

Last week we talked about planting seeds. This week we’re talking about pulling weeds. The two go together. From what I gather from people who know more than me about gardening, planting seeds is the easy part. Weeding is much more time consuming and labor-intensive. As someone has said: “When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.” There is a corollary to that truth: “To distinguish flowers from weeds, simply pull up everything. What grows back is weeds.”

Some of you can relate to one unknown homemaker who wrote:

- I don’t do windows because I love birds and don’t want one to fly into a clean window and get hurt.
- I don’t wax floors because I’m afraid a guest will slip and get hurt then I’ll feel terrible (plus they may sue me.)
- I don’t disturb cobwebs because every creature deserves a home of their own.
- I don’t Spring Cleaning because I love all the seasons and don’t want the others to get jealous.

- I don't put things away because my spouse will never be able to find them again.
- I don't cook dinner every night because it's my economic duty to support area restaurants.
- And finally: I don't pull weeds in the garden because I don't want to get in God's way; God is an excellent designer! [from "Pulling Weeds" by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

In today's lesson, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is a field with wheat and weeds growing in it. Honestly, that's a little jarring. The Kingdom of God is not perfect – at least the Kingdom of God that's already begun on earth. It's got weeds. It's got problems. Did you know that? Now, I don't believe those things are permanent or eternal, but they're part of the Kingdom of God as we experience it right now. The way Jesus tells it, the farmer plants good seed, but weeds grow too.

Now, Jesus blames these weeds on an enemy, presumably the devil (according to his own explanation), but it seems to me that weeds infect even the gardens of people who don't have vindictive mortal enemies. The seeds of weeds arrive on the wind or in the fur or feathers of critters, and weeds just seem to pop up. At issue isn't how the weeds got there, but the fact that they're there and must be dealt with. And the particular weed to which Jesus refers is worse than most. Traditionally called a 'tare', these kind of weeds are commonly known as 'bearded darnel'. In science-speak, "...that's *Lolium temulentum*, a species of rye-grass, the seeds of which are a strong soporific poison. It is nearly indistinguishable from wheat until the ear appears, and only then is the difference discovered. It grows plentifully in Syria and Palestine." [from Todd Weir, *Wheat and Tares*, illustrations for Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] Jesus was probably quite familiar with it, for elsewhere in scripture, he notes that we will be known by our fruit. And it's only the fruit that distinguishes wheat from bearded darnel.

When the owner of the field discovers the weeds in the wheat, he instructs his servants to let them grow up together. Reflecting on this, Barbara Brown Taylor writes in her book *Bread of Angels*: "This is a stunning statement, not least of all because it seems to advocate passivity in the face of evil." But that's not a fair assessment, or at least, not one true to the text. I entitled the sermon this morning "On Using Good Judgement". It's a play on words. Good judgement helps us make choices that make the world a little better and that help both our own well-being and the well-being of those we care about. We bite back the snarky comment knowing that as satisfying as it might be to deliver, the would-be recipient has had a rough day. We don't take money from the till or cheat on the test or fudge our taxes because we know our integrity is too precious to squander. We call a friend or an Uber when we've had too much to drink because God-forbid we hurt someone. Poor judgement does the opposite. Judgement is really about the choices we make day in and day out. None of us have a perfect track record when it comes to judgement, but most of us understand, at least in theory, that the choices we make day in and day out is where the faith in our hearts meets the reality of our living. Thus, as we dive into this text, we find that Jesus has some very specific lessons to teach us, and they center around using good judgement.

The first lesson is very simple. Things are not always what they seem. As we've already noted, even the best farmer in the world cannot tell bearded darnel apart from wheat until it matures. It's not always easy to distinguish weed from wheat.

Years ago, I heard about a young woman active in another youth group at a United Methodist Church near mine. She was awarded a scholarship by the United Methodist Women of her church to attend one of the quadrennial UMW conventions as a youth representative. About two months before the convention, it was discovered that this young lady was 17 years old and pregnant. She'd met some guy, made a bad choice. It happens. The local UMW chapter at her church revoked the scholarship, determining that she was no longer an acceptable youth representative. Debased and humiliated, the

family left the church. Today, that young lady is a doctor – she’s an M.D. And the child she bore is in med school. They are valuable, contributing members of society. They support the arts, and charities, and all kinds of good things in their community. But they have no use for the church. And still today, I grieve that such judgementalism sowed more weeds than wheat. But then again, it’s very easy for me to point fingers at those women, that girl, her family. Maybe I’m judging, too.

And maybe that’s what Jesus wanted to avoid.. You see, Jesus explains this parable by noting that the good seed are the children of the kingdom and the weeds are the children of the evil one. But I think Alexander Solzhenitsyn might have been a little closer to the truth when he writes, “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” My heart is a mix of wheat and weeds. I think Jesus teaches his disciples not to judge, not only because it can be hard to distinguish wheat from weeds in the real world, but also because we ourselves are guilty of being weedy from time to time.

“The truth is that Jesus is not impassive in the face of evil. In fact, he takes it quite seriously. He taught very clearly that the world is a battlefield where the forces of good and the forces of evil are always in conflict. But the enemy is not some imaginary person out there. It is our own divided selves. How dare we pass judgment on others when we fall short in so many ways ourselves? [2 ¶s adapted from “Counterfeit Christians and the Rest of Us” by Gary W. Houston, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] It’s hard to tell the wheat from the weeds sometimes, because most of us are both. Which isn’t to say we shouldn’t decry evil when we see it. But it is to caution us against confusing people with issues.

“The real problem is that when we pass judgment on others, we distance ourselves from them and disable our ability to be vehicles of God’s grace. Our central task is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ – to help other people experience God’s grace just as we have experienced that grace. Knowing that all of us are a mix of wheat and weeds, how can we share the gospel of grace if we come across as one with a condemning attitude? [from “What to Do with the Weeds” by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] And in what seems like a great paradox, the truth is that justice thrives where mercy does. A merciful society promotes understanding and empathy, and these are the power tools that dismantle hate and evil.

Frank Marquart explains how, as a young man in seminary, his ideal congregation was The Church of Our Savior’s in Washington, DC. He writes, “...among my peers and friends, that congregation was the ideal, the inspiration, the model to which we aspired. It was a relatively small congregation of 200 people who renewed their spiritual vows each year. Their vows were to tithe, to attend Bible study every week, to pray every day, to be politically active for the poor every week. And they signed on the dotted line every year. These people were committed. That was my ideal community in those younger years. But not anymore. Maybe I have matured. Maybe I’m just more realistic. But now, I want a community that is wide open to all people, including the uncommitted, the half committed, the lukewarm, the confused, the puzzled, the materialistic, the messed up; the addicted, the afflicted and the conflicted: we are all welcome here. Wheat and weeds are equally welcome here because, quite frankly, I am no longer as sure which is which and who is who, as I used to be when I was a younger man. [Adapted from Edward F. Markquart, *Weeds and Wheat*, illustrations for Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] So I welcome everybody. I minister to everybody. I try, as much as humanly possible, to love everybody. Because if the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, then maybe I’m as half-hearted as anyone else.

F.B. Meyer once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. It’s also worth noting that we really do not know what we

would have done in the same circumstances, all things being equal. [from Stephen Brown, *Christianity Today*, April 5, 1993, p. 17.]

In the story Jesus tells, the wheat is wheat and the weeds are weeds. We already know, though that we can be both at once in our hearts. We also know that in God's field, weeds can be redeemed, transformed, and rebirthed as wheat. This is the gospel message. None of us is doomed to remain weedy. We believe in redemption. Some of the best things in life started out as weeds – blackberries, clover, leeks, garlic, violets, pussywillows, honeysuckle, and ivy. But they add taste and beauty to our meals and our world, and their value is redeemed by the fruit they bear.

Barbara Brown Taylor concludes her chapter on "Why the Boss Said No" by noting that the wheat does not spend its time attacking the weeds growing up beside it, the weeds whose roots are entangled with their own; otherwise, the wheat risks the opposite transformation – that it may become weed, all riled up, full of prickles and poison – good guys who turn into bad guys while trying to put the bad guys out of business. No, she says. Instead, she references Jesus' teaching from the sermon on the mount: "don't resist an evildoer, but love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your heavenly father, for he makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous.

"God allows a mixed field, in other words, and whether we like it, approve of it, understand it or not, God asks us to tolerate a mixed field too – both in the church and in the world – only this is not even remotely a call to passivity. It is, instead, a call to strenuous activity (as any of you who have tried to love your enemies lately already know). It is not easy being wheat, especially with so many weeds competing for the sun and the soil, but what the Boss seems to know is that the best and only real solution to evil is to bear good fruit.

"Our job, in a mixed field, is not to give ourselves to the enemy by devoting all our energy to the destruction of the weeds, but to mind our own business, so to speak – our business being the reconciliation of the world to God through the practice of unshielded love. If we will give ourselves to that, God will take care of the rest – the harvest, the reapers, the fire – all of it. Our job is to be wheat, even in a messy field – to go on bearing witness to the one who planted us among those who seem to have been planted by someone else. [3 ¶s from Barbara Brown Taylor, "Why the Boss Said No" in *Bread of Angels* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1997) pg. 152-153.] Given that we can't always tell the weeds from the wheat, and that we ourselves are wheat and weed at heart, and given that God can transform weed into wheat, we who profess to be servants of the Lord of the Harvest would do well to use our good judgement to bear good fruit and good witness. May it be so. Amen.