

Genesis 28:10-19a  
Matthew 13:24-30

## WEEDS AMONG THE WHEAT

Recently, my three siblings and two of their spouses came from North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas for a weeklong visit. My older brother and his wife from Tulsa, and my younger sister from Austin, marveled at the fields of kudzu growing throughout this area. They were amazed at how the kudzu plant consumes trees, telephone poles, deserted houses, entire hillsides, and everything else in its path. Kudzu grows as much as twelve inches in a twenty-four hour period and up to fifty feet in a single season, which explains its reputation as “the vine that ate the South.”

Did you know that kudzu was brought to this country to decorate the Japanese pavilion at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876? An exotic import, it became popular as a shade plant, a hay and forage crop, and as the solution to erosion after the Great Depression. Kudzu soon became the darling of the Soil Conservation Service. Between 1935 and 1942, government nurseries produced 84 million kudzu seedlings and planted them wherever they would grow. By 1943, the Kudzu Club of America had 20,000 members, and southern belles competed for the coveted title of Kudzu Queen. Kudzu replaced cotton as the crop of the future, but the vine’s chief virtue – its magnificent rate of growth – soon turned out to be its fatal flaw. Fruit growers began to complain that kudzu was choking their orchards; farmers reported that it broke their baling machines; and, railroad engineers accused it of causing trains to slip off their tracks. It was not long before the kudzu nurseries shut down, the Kudzu Club was disbanded, and the United States Department of Agriculture demoted kudzu to weed status, a weed being defined as “a plant that does more harm than good.” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven*, pages 34-35)

As we envision the kudzu plant and how it has wreaked havoc across the southern landscape, we are in a better position to hear the parable Jesus told about the weeds among the wheat. A farmer sowed good seed in a field of wheat. However, during the night, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the good seed, thus threatening the crop. The surprising twist to Jesus’ story comes when the farmer refuses his workers’ offer to pluck up the weeds, saying instead that the weeds and wheat should grow together until the harvest when both will be dealt with accordingly.

As with many of Jesus’ parables, this isn’t a nice little morality tale that has a happy ending. I’m not sure that I fully understand this parable but there are a few things we can glean from its contents. For one, I don’t understand why there is so much evil in the world. It is hard to fathom the cruelty and pain that the human species inflicts on one another. We despair of hearing about one more senseless attack, murder or genocide – whether close to home or thousands of miles away. Why does evil exist?

The Bible doesn’t go to great lengths to explain the existence of evil. Genesis 3 talks about the serpent and the subsequent fall within the Garden of Eden. The Book of Job, which addresses the problem of evil, concludes with the thought that human suffering is a mystery. Jesus himself said that it rains on the just and the unjust.

However, in this parable for today, we learn that “an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. And, when asked, “Where did these weeds come from?” the farmer answered,

“An enemy has done this.” That’s all, but at the very least, it means that God didn’t do it. It’s not part of the plan for the Creation. It’s not God’s intention that evil things should happen. Given our free will, all of us have a choice, a say-so in the matter, and too many times we choose wrongly, which results in hurt and pain within us and to those around us. The Bible has a lot to say about that which we know all too well as sin and its horrible consequences.

The second point then is an obvious one: there is a mixture of good seed and bad seed throughout the earth. Whether we are talking about the world at large, the church in Matthew’s time or the church today, or each and every member of Christ’s body, good and evil coexist. We are not totally bad, and we are not perfectly pure either. Martin Luther said it best: we are, at the same time, both saint and sinner. We are wheat, to be sure, but at times, we behave suspiciously like weeds. One of the ways we do that is our human affection for judging one another.

In his book *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, H. A. Ironside pointed out the folly of judging others. He told the story of Bishop Potter, who was headed for Europe on a great ocean liner. Upon boarding, he discovered that he was to share his cabin with another passenger. After meeting his roommate, the bishop went to the purser’s desk to ask if he could place his valuables in the ship’s safe. Judging from the appearance of his roommate, he explained, he was suspicious of the man’s trustworthiness. Accepting the bishop’s valuables, the purser replied, “It’s all right, bishop, I’ll be very glad to take care of them for you. The other man has been up here and left his valuables for the same reason!”

The moral of that story is that we are all weeds to someone else, and thus, it is not the Church’s task to uproot and destroy. When we do so, we usually add to the evil in the world. God will decide and determine what the final outcome shall be. In the meantime, it is not the Christian’s job to judge another. Seldom do we have all the facts, whereas God can and does see the big picture and the innermost heart of all peoples. We are to refrain from rooting out the weeds in someone else because of the weeds within us as that blocks our clear vision. This parable calls for us to let God be God, and leave the judging to God. As for our part, Jesus said it best: “Judge not, that you be not judged... Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s (or sister’s) eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:1, 3)

If we find it difficult to refrain from judging then we would do well to turn our critical eyes inward and ask ourselves, “What sinful traits in my own life need to be exposed to the light of the gospel and uprooted so that the good seed may flourish and bear much fruit? The only person I know well enough to judge is my own self. So, where are the weeds within me that need my attention? What evil do I need to repent of and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, get rid of so that I may live a more loving life toward God and my neighbors?” That’s the only time judgment is justified.

Another thought that comes to mind with regard to this parable is to trust that God is more powerful than evil, and God will win in the end. God is able to use evil and shape it in such a way that eventually and ultimately evil is transformed to fit within the divine purpose. It was evil and the sinfulness of humankind that nailed Christ to the cross, but it was God who used that very evil for good by fashioning forgiveness out of Jesus’ death and offering eternal life through Jesus’ resurrection.

Likewise, in the Old Testament lesson for today, Jacob was a crook and a real scoundrel. But, God loved Jacob enough to go to work on him and transform him into the person God saw that he could become. Jacob had a dream, but the real Dreamer in the story was God, who refused to give up on Jacob, who changed Jacob from a “weasel” into the patriarch Israel, and

through whom God blessed the twelve tribes of Israel and finally the world through Jesus Christ. As has been said, “God somehow can write straight with crooked lines. While it is clear throughout the biblical story that God never wills evil, God is capable of using evil ingeniously to move toward goals of good.”

One final thought can be harvested from this parable. When the farmhands want to gather up the weeds, the farmer tells them to wait “for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.” The Greek word used to describe the master’s response (“let it go, permit it, suffer it, allow it”) also carries with it the meaning to forgive. Forgive the weeds in others as we have been forgiven. Forgive, just as Jesus did on the Cross. And, the waiting that’s called for by Jesus isn’t about sitting around, doing nothing! Rather, this type of waiting actively seeks to return good for evil.

In the movie, *Stars In My Crown*, there was a black man who had been kind to several generations of the children who had grown up in the little town. He told them stories, taught them to hunt and fish, and he watched out for all of the children. After his wife died, he continued to live in the little cabin he owned. One year a very large deposit of copper was discovered that ran through his property. The business leaders of the town came to the old man to buy his land so they could start a mining operation. But, the old black man refused to sell. He simply wanted to live out his days in the only house he had ever known. When the businessmen could not buy him out, they resorted to nasty threats. Many of the very children whom he had befriended all his life were now his foes. They said, “If you are not off of the property by sundown tomorrow night, we are going to come and kill you.”

The old preacher got wind of what was happening and went out to the black man’s house. At sundown, the executioners rode up, hiding behind white hoods and masks. The old preacher stepped out on the porch with the black man and said, “John knows that he is going to die. He asked me to come out today and write his last will and testimony. He wants me to read it to you. He wants to give his fishing rod to Pete, because he remembers the first bass he caught with it. He wants to give his rifle to James, because he remembers using it to teach him to shoot.” Item by item, the old gentleman proceeded to give in love to the very people who had come to take his life. The impact of this loving response was more than even their hardened spirits could handle. One by one, the would-be executioners turned away in silence until no one was left. The little grandson had been watching this whole drama from a distance. After the crowd had dispersed, he ran up on the porch and said to his grandfather, “What kind of will was that?” The old grandfather answered gently, “It was the will of God, son – the will of God.” (From John Claypool’s sermon, *Overcoming Evil with Good*)

The best solution to evil in our world, to the weeds among the wheat, is to forego judgment, forgive others, and do our part by overcoming evil with good, as best as we can. Then, we wait with trust and patience for the ultimate vindication that will come in the end – just like resurrection follows crucifixion – God wins. May it be so. Amen.

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