

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
"Watch it with that weed-wacker"

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Galatians 6:1-10

Opening Hymn: Come, ye thankful people, come 803 (1/2/3)

Closing Hymn: The Church's One Foundation 479 (1/3/4)

Children's Hymn: Can you find one for the next few weeks Charlene? Three Sunday stories include parable of wheat and weeds, feeding of 5000/walking on the sea, Transfiguration (one idea: God is so God)

Choruses: Think about his love, How deep the Father's love for us, ONE MORE

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I love Jesus' parables.

Jesus draws us into an exploration

Of the life of faith

By telling us tales from everyday living.

He stimulates our imagination

And invites us to consider new perspectives

Even as his parables

Take unexpected twists and turns.

Today's parable is no exception.

A farmer sows a field.

But when the shoots spring up

His hired-hands notice a serious problem.

There are thistles, thousands of them

Showing their heads among the newly sprouted wheat.

The farmer's employees are shocked by this development.

They even question the owner's competence:

Had he purchased new seed?

Had the seed been properly cleaned?

The owner assures them

That yes, he knows what he's doing

And that the seed he planted was high-quality, and clean.

As for the invasion of weeds

He chalks it up to sabotage:

An enemy is trying to destroy his harvest,

To get him off the land.

PAUSE

Now it's worthwhile stopping here for a moment

and consider what Jesus has laid out thus far.

What lesson might be lingering

even at the beginning of the parable?

It is important to keep in mind that

Jesus isn't teaching us about farming.

Jesus is using agrarian imagery to disclose something important

about the life of the church.

If the lesson is not instantly obvious

His later explanation to the disciples makes it clearer.

At the outset Jesus is telling us that kingdom of heaven,
That the church, is a place of diverse characters.
It is a place where the self-less mingle with the selfish.
It is a place where the toxic and the healthy mix.

We rarely acknowledge this.
We tend to talk about everyone being so kind
To one another.

And yet most of us know at least one person
Who has left church because of a dreadful experience
With another person.

If the church is a family,
it is sometime a very dysfunctional one.

Now maybe we think that church life should be different.
Qualitatively different than the life we encounter in our workplaces,
Or out in the surrounding community.

Well Jesus would warn us that every church is imperfect;
every congregation remains 100 miles from heaven.

He wants us to know there will always
be broken and hurtful people among the faithful.
God's enemy is active.
Weeds are planted among the grain.

Interesting thought.

I don't know about you but it
Whets my appetite for more of the story.

Given this unhappy reality what will the farmer do?
Maybe more importantly, what are we to do?
Well as soon as those hired-hands hear that word 'sabotage'
They are seething angry.
They want to do something, anything,
To remedy this situation.

One starts talking about picking up some Roundup.
Another says he knows a good crop-duster
And starts searching for the number on his cell.

And yet strangely, the farmer
is uneasy with their enthusiasm.

You see the farmer knows this land: it was his grandfather's.
He knows how to nurture crops: he studied agriculture at University.

Over the years he's had experience with chemicals:
Some good, some bad, some indifferent.
But what he's learned
Is that when it comes to any application of herbicide
The timing is crucial.

He tells his employees.
That it is too late for any Roundup.
Yes, it will take out those darn thistles
But it will also destroy the wheat.

Now this is an unexpected turn.

We were ready to join them and
Jump in with our weed-wackers!

And so maybe there's another important lesson
Waiting to be learned.

We live in a world of 'instant'.

We want matters resolved as quickly as possible.

When we are confronted with troublemakers
There is the temptation to move swiftly
And deal decisively.

And yet how we respond

Really and truly matters.

Moreover, sometimes the medicine
can be more damaging than the disease.

Sometimes the greatest disasters
Aren't caused by the wicked.

Sometimes the greatest disasters

Are caused by good-hearted individuals

Who take things too far as they try to root out problems.

Now I'm not saying that Jesus is opposed to church discipline.

Jesus gives us a framework, a process

For dealing with conflict when it arises.

You'll find that a few chapters ahead in Matthew 18.

But if we take that process (Matthew 18)
And read it together with this parable (Matthew 13)

We'll realise that while we ought to be concerned
About the conduct of those around us,
there is great danger
In any rash attempt to establish a pure church.

How many church splits have followed an overzealous attempt
To deal with a small problem in the community?

Today's epistle shrewdly advises
that we'd best be gentle with those who have been caught in sin
lest we also be tempted
and find ourselves to be the taller weed.ⁱ

But Jesus' parable doesn't finish here.

His last word is not about the frustrating coexistence
Of weeds and wheat.
His last word is about the harvest.

The farmer encourages his hired men
That despite the sabotage,
Despite the emergence of all those thistles
That there will be a great ingathering.

He reminds them that at the end of summer
they will be climbing into their trucks,
rolling out the swathers and combines
Working delightful 18-hour shifts.

He encourages them to not despair about those thistles.

Harvest time will come eventually.

And when this happens those weeds will be eliminated

While the grain will be safely brought in.

Maybe this is where we learn

the most important lesson of the parable:

The wheat WILL be gathered.

God's good purposes WILL prevail.

Whether Jesus is talking about weeds and wheat

Or sheep and goats

He promises a great and final judgement

Where every trace

Of sin and evil are decisively dealt with.

No longer will the schemes of the wicked

Prevail over the plans of the righteous.

No longer will those with narrow interests

Rule the roost in the church.

God's people will be purified

Of every dark encumbrance.

We will be set free

to fully enjoy the gifts God has given.

Well did you 'hear' the parable?

Let anyone with ears listen!

Through the use of this parable

Jesus reveals that life in the church promises to be challenging.

In Jesus' church you'll see the good alongside the bad,

Wherever you choose to worship.

Jesus also warns us to be careful in judgment:

To be wise and discerning

in every attempt to confront and restore,

lest we do more damage than good.

Then Jesus also leaves us with encouragement.

That in the end those who have been faithful

will be recognised clearly:

“they will shine like the sun

in the kingdom of their Father”.ⁱⁱ

PAUSE

Most of us have bruises and scars

That we have received in the church.

For many of us this raises questions about our faith

And is a source of embarrassment.

“Church shouldn't be like this!” we complain to ourselves.

Well could it be that one day these wounds

will be seen as medals of great honour?

For they proclaim our ongoing commitment to Christ

In the face of great difficulty.

Until that day...

May we do all we can to live together in ways that please God.
And may God guard us and preserve us
And keep us steadfast in the faith.

Amen.

ⁱ Galatians 6:1

ⁱⁱ Matthew 13:43 NRSV