

Matthew 13: 24-30,36-43 Wheat and Weeds

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Father, grant us ears that may truly hear you. Amen.

I have a neighbour who hates dandelions, I mean really hates them. Cannot bear them. In spring he's out there with his weedkiller pouncing on any little yellow head that dares to open up. His lawn is pristine green, nothing but green grass. To my taste, that is a bit boring, but for him dandelions are loathsome weeds, they are annoying, they spoil the perfection he is seeking, and they are to be ruthlessly exterminated.

I wonder if some of you feel the same. I confess, I have spent many an hour digging up dandelions in my lawn, in a vain attempt to get rid of them. And yet, walking around our local footpaths this spring, how often the vivid green of the newly growing grass has been brightened by the myriad little yellow stars of dandelions. They are such a vibrant colour. And of course the bees love them too – they provide a wonderful early source of pollen food. And after all, what is a weed? I'm sure you've heard the definition that a weed is only a plant growing where we don't want it.

Now, the weed Jesus is talking about in this parable is quite a nasty weed, zizania or darnel: it looks a lot like wheat, until it's nearly mature. But the grain from it is poisonous and can cause illness if not carefully separated out from the wheat – a job that usually fell to the women folk. I understand there is a theory that it is a corrupt form of wheat – like a genetic mutation, as though it started out good but turned bad. That is

not certain, but it's quite a thought as we reflect on the weeds and the wheat in our own lives.

Because, my friends, this is what this parable is about. I'm sure some of us, on hearing it, will ask, with some anxiety, "Oh dear! Am I wheat or am I weed?" And of course, we can all be pretty good at deciding whether other people are weeds or wheat! We are often pretty quick to judge! Sadly the history of the Church is full of such woeful judgments, where one group have decided that the other lot are weeds and, like my neighbour's dandelions, have to be exterminated at all costs. Just think of all the burnings at the stake during the years of the Reformation. Or think of the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda, or think of N Ireland, S Africa, Bosnia – the list could go on and on. We so often think we know who are the weeds, and who are the wheat. And we think we must get rid of the weeds!

Happily for us, Jesus tells us that is not our job. The farmer in our parable, representing Son of Man, Jesus, says "Let the weeds and wheat grow together". Don't get out there trying to pull up what you think might be the weeds, don't go spraying the Roundup all over the place – you could do far more harm than good! In due time, God himself will sort out the wheat and weeds. It is his job, not ours.

That is not to say that we should turn a blind eye to evil, be it in others or in ourselves. It is not saying that evil doesn't matter. But it is saying that we can be far too hasty in deciding where the evil really lies and what should be done about it. We are not to be blind to the evil in ourselves;

and we are not to be blind to the wheat that is there in others, to the good in them, even if we think they are probably weeds! We have to learn to recognise both, in ourselves, and in others. And we have to learn to live with them, trusting that God will deal with us all, in his own time, in his compassion and mercy and justice.

And more than that, we have in this parable a recognition of REALITY. My dear old Mum often used to complain, "Nothing in this life is ever perfect!" And, of course, she was right. But do we expect things to be perfect? Have we any right to expect things to be perfect? Is it sensible to expect other people to be perfect? Are we ourselves perfect? I think the answer to all those is NO. As our parable tells us, it's all weeds and wheat mixed in together, growing side by side. That is the reality of life. And God says, that's OK. Let me deal with it. Your job is just to grow as good strong wheat. Yes, there are weeds in your life. Let me deal with them.

For in ourselves, we are all a mixture of the good and the bad. I find it's one of the annoying features of our celebrity culture that we like to hold people up as stars, as heroes, or role models, they get put on a pedestal, praised to the heavens, and only later do we find that they are flawed – they are not the great perfect beings we had made them out to be. And then we can be merciless in our condemnation. Thank God that he is not like that! Thank God that he is full of mercy and kindness and compassion. Thank God that he sees the weed in us and loves us just the same. Thank God that he knows what we can be and will help us to get there, if we will let him.

Becoming what he wants us to be will mean that we first have to recognise the weeds in ourselves. And we will not just recognise the weeds in ourselves, but we shall also be able to recognise the wheat in everyone else. As our eyes are opened, we shall see ourselves and others more as God sees us. And we shall be compassionate towards them as we pray God is compassionate towards us.

What are the weeds in you, I wonder? You may like to reflect on that question during the week ahead. And pray about it.

I'm sure you are aware of the imperfections in your spouse, or your children, your parents or your friends. But you still love them. You recognise that they are a mixture of the good and the less good. And your love encompasses both. You don't expect them to be perfect, because you know that you yourself are not perfect. If only we could learn to love everyone with that kind of generous, accepting love. The love that Jesus showed. Remember, he knew that Judas was to betray him. He had seen the signs. But did he reject him? Did he throw him out of his group of closest disciples? No. He let the weed remain. And he still loved him.

So we too must learn to accept the presence of the weeds, in ourselves and in others. But remember, the more strongly and vigorously the wheat grows, the less room there will be for the weeds to thrive. If the wheat is weak and scrawny, the weeds will take hold. So feed your wheat! Nurture the good in you, grow strong, reach for the sky, and bring forth the fruit of the Kingdom! Amen!