

What to do about the weeds?

What to do about the weeds? That was the question on my dad's mind in the summer of 1988. It had been a dry spring – perfect growing conditions for a weed called crabgrass. And, sure enough, in two-week's time, little clumps of it began replacing the grass all over our lawn. It was an epidemic. Something had to be done, or we wouldn't have a lawn left.

But what to do with them? Well, I wish he had headed to the store and bought some round-up. But why buy roundup, when he had six kids, two hands each, to "round up" those weeds for free? I remember spending about a week that summer on my hands and knees in a dry, dusty lawn pulling up crabgrass, clump by clump, making sure to get the root, hauling bags of it to the dumpster.

What to do about the weeds? It's a question Jesus answers for us this morning in a parable he tells us. Like last week, he brings us to the farm field to teach us about our life with God – only the focus in this parable is different. Last week, the sower and the seed – that parable was all about God's work in human hearts. This parable teaches us about God's work in the world. It's a parable that answers some tough questions in life: Why is there so much evil in the world? If God is all-powerful, why doesn't he do more to get rid of it? If Jesus is the winner, and we're on the winning team, why does it seem like Christianity is losing, and evil has the upper hand?

To teach us, Jesus pictures the world as a field a lot like my lawn in 1988 – good plants growing alongside bad. Wheat among weeds. What to do about the weeds? Jesus' answer might surprise us.

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ " 'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' "

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

This is one of those parables where Jesus doesn't leave us hanging as to what the picture he painted represents. The farmer is Jesus – **the Son of Man**. His field is **the world**. And Jesus is busy working in this world, planting **good seed**. No one is good by nature – but Jesus is busy making people good, holy, by bringing them to faith in him. The wheat being planted – that's Jesus, planting and growing believers in the world.

But wherever Jesus is at work to save, the devil is at work to destroy. Jesus pictures the devil as an enemy who sneaks into the master's wheat field at night and scatters weed seed right alongside the wheat seed. The weeds he scatters are unbelievers – **sons of the evil one**. Wherever Jesus is at work growing believers, the devil is at work keeping people in their unbelief. And the result is wheat among weeds.

I don't think it takes a gardening expert to get the devil's endgame here. Why do we want weeds out of our garden? Not just so it looks pretty – because weeds are bad for what we've planted. They rob them of water and nutrients. Eventually, they can choke the plants out. The devil has unbelievers planted all around us. Classmates at school. Coworkers at work. People we see when we turn on the TV. And his goal is to use their ungodly influence – their opposition to our faith, the temptation to live sinful lifestyles like theirs, pressure to conform to their way of thinking and living - to choke out our faith. And that makes living as wheat among weeds difficult – even dangerous.

So, what to do about the weeds? Jesus tells us that God has a plan, and it's not too different from my dad's. To send out harvesters (angels) to pull up the weeds and throw them into the fire (hell), and to harvest the wheat and bring it into the storehouse (heaven). But Jesus' focus here is *when* that will happen: Not now. At the harvest. On Judgment Day. For now, he calls us to patiently endure as wheat among weeds.

And that's not easy. I can't imagine it was easy for those workers to sit and watch as the weeds grew taller and taller. It's not easy for us to do the same. This is what we see, isn't it? Weeds are growing and thriving. Unbelief is on the rise. Wickedness is increasing. The fastest growing religious group in our country is the "nones" – as in no religion. You'll only find about 18% of Americans in church any given week, while about half of Americans are viewing porn in the same time period. Biblical morals once widely believed are now being thrown in the trash. Sins that a few years ago weren't even mentioned now flaunted in public for all to see. Anti-christian sentiment is at an all-time high. It bothers us, to see weeds thriving like that. It's a struggle, to resist their influence day in and out. It worries us, to see how dangerous the field is becoming for wheat – when we see all the weeds ready to choke out our children's faith, our faith.

What to do about the weeds? Shouldn't something be done about this *now*? You know, the servants in the parable – they come up with a pretty reasonable solution. **The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?** Why not? Isn't this what we do in our gardens – in our yard in '88 – when weeds are becoming a problem? Get rid of 'em. Pull 'em up, throw them into the fire as soon as possible.

Tragically, very mistaken Christians have tried that. Like when during the crusades people strapped swords to their sides and went off to the Holy Land to kill Muslims in Jesus' name. Or during the Inquisition when the church was burning and killing "heretics." Some have tried to get rid of the problem of weeds more peacefully – by living in seclusion away from the unbelieving world. All go against Jesus' words here: **Let both grow together until the harvest.**

Even if those things have never crossed your mind, the question still bothers us, right? Why does God wait? If Jesus is the winner, why does it seem like the weeds are winning, and the wheat losing? Why

doesn't he do something *now* to get rid of the weeds? If he really cares about the wheat, wouldn't he just eliminate this threat as soon as possible?

But Jesus says, **No**. And it's not because he *doesn't* care about wheat; it's because he *does*. **No**, he replied, **because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them**. Growing season isn't done. Children of God are still being planted. And it might not make any sense in a wheat field, but by God's power, weeds can be turned into wheat. Jesus patiently waits, because he cares for every soul. Because he lived and bled and died to win forgiveness and salvation for all people. And he patiently waits, because he doesn't want any soul to perish, but every soul to repent and believe in him and be saved – he wants weeds to become wheat!

Think of the Apostle Paul – he was Saul, the unbeliever, the weed. And boy, was he a threat to the wheat! He was choking them from city to city, putting Christians to death. I wonder if Christians in his day didn't think, "God, why don't you just pull this weed up and throw him on the burn pile?" But God loved Saul, too. And he patiently waited until the time was right, and he worked faith in Saul's heart...and the persecutor of saints became the apostle to the Gentiles.

Or think a bit closer to home. Think about your story. Do you realize it's really no different than Saul's? You and I were not always wheat! We came into this world as weeds. But Jesus didn't throw us on the burn pile. He was patient with us. And whether it was as a baby or an adult, through baptism or the word, he waited until the time was right, and he worked faith in your hearts...and washed your sins away with his forgiveness...and clothed you in his righteousness. And weeds became wheat.

What to do about the weeds? For now, Jesus patiently waits, so that he can make weeds into wheat. But he won't wait forever. The harvest will come. Jesus will return. **The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.** ⁴² **They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** ⁴³ **Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.**

These words – do they scare you at all? The angels rooting out all who do evil – and you look at your life and all the evil *you've* done that should put you on that list. The angels gathering the righteous to their eternal home – and you look in the mirror and see anything but righteous.

Ah...but through faith in Jesus, that's not what God sees. Jesus died and paid for your sins. God no longer sees any evil when he looks at you. Jesus lived perfectly in your place. Through faith, his righteousness is yours already now. And on that day, it will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father.

What a place that will be! Can you imagine it? No more weeds. No more evil. Nothing to cause sin. Everything that was wrong, God has made right. No more sorrow or pain or fear. Just perfect peace and joy, shining like the sun with God forever.

But until then, God calls us to wait. And as we wait, we live as wheat among weeds. And it's not easy. We'll see the weeds grow, and we'll be tempted to worry. The devil will try to use them to choke us out, and it'll be a struggle to resist. But don't forget who the owner of the field is. Jesus. It might seem like the devil and the weeds have the upper hand, but they don't. The one who rules this world is the Jesus who loved you more than his own life, who died to save you. And he promises he rules over evil for your good. The world will try to choke your faith, but Jesus will use all of your trials and hardships to do the opposite: Strengthen you. And he'll use you for the good of the weeds, too. He's got you there, and hasn't taken you to heaven, so that you can let the light of his gospel shine on them – so that more weeds can become wheat. God grant it – until he brings the harvest home. Amen.