

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 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?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 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.'" 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." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

**Wheat and Weeds** - July 19, 2020  
*Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43*

Here's a fearsome thought. It is the middle of July and already we are being bombarded with political TV ads. For a while at home, we'd push the mute button on the remote whenever one came on that we didn't like. Sometimes we still do, but mostly they just play through as background noise. The scary thing is that if we're seeing this amount of ads already, just imagine what it's going to be like come October! Hooray for Netflix!

At the same time, I'm equally sure that there are plenty of people, in fact we know there are plenty of people out there who have views which are totally opposite mine. The only thing we may have in common is our mutual dread and loathing of the endless political ads.

The problem, of course, is when we take a moment to think about what those who disagree with us are like. Those on the leftward end of the political spectrum may imagine those on the other side as gun-toting, confederate flag loving, flat-earth believing ignoramuses whose most fervent wish is to roll America back to 1950.

On the other hand, there are many on the rightward side who are convinced the opposition is desperate to destroy America, abolish the police, and hates God. Those in the center can't stand either side and wishes they would all go away.

At issue, of course, is that we know that there has been very little meaningful dialog among people with opposite points of view. More and more, our tendency is to associate exclusively with people we agree with and ignore the others. Think of your last family gathering, before all this Covid stuff began. If you knew that Uncle Mike was a, say, "liberal commie" and you have a Ronald Reagan poster in your bedroom, how likely would you be to strike up a conversation with Uncle Mike — maybe about the Flyers or the Sixers cause they're doing pretty well this year. But otherwise, nothing.

Most people who think they know all about the other side, simply avoid the other side. I mean we at Collingswood Pres like to advertise that we are an inclusive church. But what does inclusive mean? Anyone who drives past us nowadays can get a fairly good idea of who we are and what we stand for. Obviously, we think our signs are great. Not everyone agrees. Is it possible, is it even desirable to be 100% inclusive? I frankly don't know what that would look like. I don't know if it's even possible.

But I'm just talking about outward statements and beliefs. This week, Mary Trump released a book about her uncle, the president, in which she claimed that many of his behaviors can be attributed to his upbringing. The child taking after the father. There are certainly many people whose beliefs and personalities have been profoundly affected by not only how they were raised, but also by traumatic,

sometime violent incidents — things that have been done to them or things they've seen. Of course, just looking at someone from the outside, you might never know the trauma they have endured and may still be enduring. You just can't tell.

But then, of course, there are the millions who are outwardly different from most. There are biological differences in height or weight or skin color. There are people whose clothing or personal hygiene may not conform to our expectations. There are those who use wheelchairs or walkers or have breathing machines or other devices attached to them, like I did at one point.

Unless we are confined to a windowless room, we see supposedly "different" people just about every day. The question is, when we see them, what thoughts go through our heads? I've seen posts — too many posts — on Facebook and other social media highly critical of everyone from cross-dressers to those with service dogs. They are public. These are posts from people who are up front about their attitudes. Yet, deep down, both for myself and for others, I have to wonder whether the attitudes expressed on social media are the same or close to our own attitudes, hidden way inside of us — the only difference is that we just don't tell everyone about them.

One of the consequences of the Black Lives Matter movement is to make clear that we humans are almost hard wired to spot differences among ourselves. Now all of us are different from each other internally and externally. Many of these differences we have little control over. Nonetheless, as we navigate life, we do have a choice as to how we will respond to these differences. Essentially, we can celebrate the differences, we can ignore the differences, or we can condemn our differences — actively seeking to separate ourselves from those whom we consider to be different for whatever reason.

There are times when we all embrace and celebrate our differences — we know that being different from each other is a good thing. Most marriages and long term relationships actually thrive on the fact that partners sense something in each other that they personally are missing. Someone who is reserved may seek out an extravert to broaden their life experiences. In the same way, outgoing people can be attracted to quiet ones because they know they need some peace and rest in their lives. That's just a simple example.

When I do marriage counseling, I like to give couples a brief personality survey based on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator or MBTI. I find it a useful tool to help them realize that they are different and that rather than spend their lives making each other conform to the other's expectations, they should actually learn to appreciate each other's differences and learn and grow from each other. To be

honest, I've worked with a handful of couples who seemed to have the same personality type. They eventually separated because they literally found life with their partner was too boring.

Of course, we also encounter people who are different from us in some way and we just don't care. It doesn't bother us in any way. Now I'm talking about situations where differences, though apparent, genuinely do not affect us — they don't exist. Now many of us have become skilled at noticing differences but pretending that they don't bother us — but deep inside they actually do. Over time, we either have to adjust our understanding of what different means and truly accept the other or we will eventually act out, sometimes hurtfully, in ways we might later regret.

I've known quite a few African-Americans who actually prefer the southern brand of racism to what they encountered in the North. In the South, they'd explain, at least they knew flat out they were hated. In the North, many whites would pretend to like you, until they actually had to work with you or live with you somehow. Only then the racism would emerge.

And that leads us to today's scripture on Wheat and Weeds. In yet another wonderful parable, Jesus paints the picture of the earth filled with life — all kinds of life. Some life is described as being like wheat. Wheat, as we know, is a grain and very useful in making bread and cake unless of course you are on a gluten-free diet. If for you wheat is bad, just imagine Jesus is talking about rice or corn or some other grain.

Then, of course, are the weeds, sown by what Jesus called "the enemy." What a nice generic term! The enemy. Well, we all have enemies, don't we? We all know people we don't get along with or have even hurt us in some way. Enemies are great because whenever something goes wrong in life, we can blame whatever it is on them.

Obviously then, in our humble opinions, we are the ones, the good farmers, who plant the good wheat. In our minds it is clear that the enemy is the evil one or anyone who plants the bad weeds.

But what is wheat? What are weeds? Wheat is a grain, a grain eaten by billions of people to help us live. You would automatically think of wheat as being a good thing. However, if someone is on a gluten-free diet and knows that wheat messes up digestion, wheat is a terrible thing. In their view, wheat is actually a weed, a very bad weed.

But what are weeds? The best definition of weeds I have heard is that weeds are just plants growing where they aren't supposed to grow.

I mean in the spring and summer when we drive on the interstates, we often see beautiful wildflowers on the grass in the middle of the road and on the hills with the exit ramps. But, if those very same

wildflowers showed up in our own gardens or in our own lawns, what a disaster! Out comes the rakes, the shovels, even the dreaded Roundup. How can something so beautiful in one place be so terrible in another place. The beautiful wildflower is suddenly a horrible weed.

What Jesus is saying is that far from being obvious, the nature of wheat and weeds is very subjective. There is a classification of plants called nightshade. Vegetables like bell peppers and tomatoes are part of that family. There is nothing like a fresh Jersey tomato, is there? But the nightshade family also includes a plant called Belladonna, which is poisonous. Only a handful of berries or even a single leaf can kill you. Yet every day, I take a drug made from Belladonna to help with my blood pressure. It is quite effective. Poison for one can, when used properly, can save another's life.

That, friends is the real danger of judgement and prejudice. Before we can make decisions about the world and how it ought to function, we need to first be aware of our own attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. We need to figure out why we are the way we are — not just on how we view the world, but even things like coming to terms with our own bodies, our own limitations, our own expectations. All these aspects of ourselves can be changed, sometime a little, sometimes a lot. But before we can even make decisions about the rest of the world, we have to be thoroughly acquainted with ourselves.

One piece of advice I always give people before they seek a relationship with another person is that they have first to have a relationship with themselves and with God. We have to know who we are, why we are, and just be realistic with ourselves. Coming to such realizations are, of course, a lifetime process. Having a relationship with God by accepting Christ in your life will, I guarantee, make the process of knowing yourself much easier and much more satisfying. But then, and only then, when we are actually aware of ourselves and feeling comfortable with ourselves can we even consider looking at the rest of the world individually and collectively and forming an opinion of it.

Friends, the best part of getting to know ourselves is that the more we get to know ourselves and the more we grow closer to God, the less the differences among ourselves will matter. In the parable, Jesus said the householder told the workers to do nothing about separating the wheat from the weeds. Only at the end would the householder personally decide what to keep and what to throw away. Isn't that great news?

Jesus is trying to show us that there is no need to judge the world. There is no need to fuss over our differences. There is no need to decide for ourselves who or what is useful or useless. God, whom I hope we trust, is making those decisions for us. The same God who planted us, is raising us, and at the right time will bring us home when God harvests us.

Who is wheat? Who is weeds? Who cares! God is in charge! Hallelujah!