

Focus: Jesus gets down in the weeds of human life.

If you remember from last week, Jesus talked about sowing. This week, the down-on-the-farm parables continue, and Jesus is talking about weeding. I don't know about you, but I hate weeding. I'm down on my knees, the sun is beating down, half the time, it seems like (at least with those dandelions) that the root snaps, which means I know I'll see it again in a few days. There are things to make it easier, of course, and sometimes there's just no way around using the heavier duty sprays. The problem, of course, is that you have to be really careful where you put that lest you hit the wrong thing and you take out your garden with the weeds.

That's actually Jesus's message today. In his parable, the field hands come to the farmer with the news that an enemy has planted "darnel," a weed that looks like wheat in the field when it first comes up. Well, it's far enough along that they can tell the difference by now, so they ask if they can simply yank it out, and Jesus says, "No, lest in the gathering of the weeds, you would **uproot** the wheat along with them."

It turns out it's not so easy to just take out the bad thing without damaging the good stuff. The problem is the roots of the wheat and the weeds are tangled together.

I think this parable has a good message for us Christians today in the 21st century. So often in the church, we assume that we are the good seed that Jesus talks about. Maybe we wouldn't say so out loud, but in our heads, we think that we are the good seed that are the children of heaven. We've been baptized. We believe. We go to church. Maybe we even give our time and money. We're law-abiding citizens. We freely admit we're not perfect—and after-all admitting we're not perfect is what makes us such good Christians.

Hey, and maybe we're actually right. Jesus doesn't say that there isn't any good seed in the world. But he also says there are weeds.

Well, the weeds, we know who these folks are, right? Weeds are lazy. They are lawbreakers. They take advantage of and abuse the system that we good seed have set up. They can't be bothered to go to church on a Sunday morning or work on a Monday morning. And yet, somehow, did you see that car they're driving? It's sure better than mine!

And you know what, maybe we're actually right about them, too. Jesus doesn't say that there aren't any weeds in the world; he knows there are.

But what he does say is that we are **tied** together. He says that our roots are tangled up with one another. He says that if you tried to remove one of those bad seeds, you'd remove the good seed right along with them.

This is a tough message for us to hear. We are taught that our lives are our own. We are taught that each one of us has to take care of his or her own business. We are taught that if we do right, we at least in some ways control our own destiny.

The worldview that Jesus describes in this parable challenges that. The worldview of this parable says that there isn't a grain of wheat who goes through this world without being in some way attached to the rest of the crop, weeds and all. Jesus in this parable says that **we are all in this together**.

This story is about roots. If we are honest, we all have people in our families who don't seem like good seeds all of the time. We like to pretend that we're all beautiful amber waves of grain and maybe the Christmas card photo that goes on the fridge or gets posted to Facebook gives that impression to everyone else. But somewhere maybe one of those family members has broken the law, or struggles with addiction or mental illness, or is a nonbeliever, or (egad!) votes the wrong way, or had an unwed or unplanned pregnancy, or is a racist, or has morals you don't approve of, or struggles to pay the energy bill on time. Maybe the person in that network of roots is a friend. You went off to college or the military or got a job and they just kind of hung around. Maybe the person is a neighbor that watches your kids or vice versa or even someone you just say hi to every now and then. Maybe at sometime in your life or even right now you struggle with some of these things. Maybe you consider yourself one of the weeds.

You see, it is so easy when we are talking about *those* people. But Jesus's parable today shows us that roots go deeper than we think. Jesus's parable takes us out of the abstract, "sinner" vs. "good Christian citizen," and makes us ask what would really happen if we got to be God for a day and got rid of the people we don't like. How many people do we think are weeds, "those people," who are other people's friends or spouses or sons or daughters or dads or moms? How many so-called weeds are neighbors?

This is an important message for us today, not because we're likely to get to play God anytime soon (he's got that covered). But it's important because I'm convinced we are in danger of losing the ability to talk to each other.

Instead of talking to each other, we talk about each other. We talk about those "weedy" politicians "on the other side" of the field and their supporters. In our own town, we talk about schools, businesses, nonprofit agencies and clinics, whether to each other, or in online gossip pages, or in the comments section of online *Madison Courier* articles. Sometimes we even talk about friends, neighbors, and other people of the church who aren't upholding their end of the bargain. It seems like no one in society from high to low gets the benefit of the doubt anymore. No one is immune from being turned into a "weed."

I think Jesus's message to us today would be that we are all in this together. These are our neighbors. These are our family. And, if not now, someday this could be you. These are our roots. Whether this is the field we would plant or not, we are tangled together in this network. When you try to uproot a neighbor, you take yourself out with them. When we talk bad about our neighbors, we ourselves break the eighth commandment that commands us to interpret everything in the best possible light. And worse than that, we break the first commandment because we give ourselves the role of playing God, the one who judges right and wrong.

Notice that this is also the mistake the field hands make. They think their job is to judge and to uproot. And the farmer says "No." In fact, when Jesus explains the parable, notice that the hands are the only group he doesn't talk about. Why? Because in his kingdom, there's no role for them. The angels are the reapers who harvest. Jesus does have an important role for us to play, but not as gossipy, uprooting field hands. Our calling in this world is to grow as seed and to be fruitful. Our job is to grow aside, together with even the weeds and to wait for Jesus to take in the harvest.

And where do we find him? Well in the story he sows the seed and then sends the reapers. He could be thought of as far away if we only had this story. But we know that's not all there is about Jesus. The remarkable thing about Jesus is that he isn't an far-off farmer. Jesus has taken his place with us in this field. From his birth in a manger, to his death on the cross, to his promise to be with us always, he has come into this world and gotten down even into the weeds.

Jesus's roots are tied up with ours and with our neighbors' and everywhere that the kingdom of heaven is growing. We see this when he says, "As you did it to the least of these, you did it to me." We see this when Paul today talks about the spirit of adoption that has made us one family with one Father. We see this because when the forces of evil tried to uproot him on the cross, they uprooted all our sins along with him, that we would yield a harvest of righteousness.

This is our God. Not as one who comes to burn and to destroy, but who engrains himself in us when we taste his body and blood, who grafts us together with our neighbors in Holy Communion. His love is for all people. When we defend our neighbors' honor, that is his love that battled the Accuser on our behalf. When we make a friend when before there was only an enemy, that is his love that said, "I call you my friends." When we realize that we are children of the same human family descended from the same Adam, that is his love that became the new Adam for our sake. And when we are tied together in our common baptism with all seeds all over the world, we are tangled together in his inseparable love.

Jesus is the grain of wheat buried in the ground on Good Friday. Whether you're a good seed or a weed or somewhere in-between, he died for you. He loves you. And we who are all tangled up in his cross are tangled together in his resurrection, too.

Brothers and sisters, this world is his field. And our love for one another is his harvest. May we grow together by his grace. **Amen.**