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Title: Leaving Weeds by the Seashore
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Scripture: [Psalm 86, Matthew 13:36-43](#)
Text: [Matthew 13:24-30, 43](#)
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I have a question. It's simple and straight forward. By a show of hands, how many of you like to pull weeds? Few people do. My grandmother did. In her last years, she was known to be head down in the garden, any garden, often. The last few weeks of her life were spent in a care facility. She would bust out and be found prayerfully

bowed, nearly standing on her head pulling weeds in the flower bed. It was almost a daily occurrence. The pastor who did her eulogy suggested that when we get to heaven, there won't be a weed in sight because Mary Spleth will have taken care of them. She is exceptional because I don't think there are many people who like to go after weeds. How many people? Few.

I am not in the few. I like planting seeds a lot more than weeding. Planting seeds is the easiest part. Weeding is much more difficult and time-consuming. And its hard work. Someone has said: "When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant."¹

There is biblical truth in just leaving weeds alone. Or so it seems. This is the second week of looking at agricultural parables that Jesus tells by the seashore. This also seems to call in question Jesus' expertise in such matters. It comes from the 13th chapter which some call "The Sermon on the Parables". Matthew divides the story of Jesus into five slices; the first is the Sermon on the Mount. Everyone knows it. Everyone prays it. You just did at the start of the service. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

Then there is the sermon on the mission. We looked at it last month. Last week, we started the sermon on the parables when, after a great controversy about healing on the Sabbath, Jesus changes his teaching style. He starts telling parables by the seashore. The first was sowing seeds by the seashore when "a sower went out to sow." His second parable by the seashore is about weeds. Specifically, about leaving weeds alone which, you

might think, given our lack of interest in weeding, should sit well with us. But there is something about it that doesn't seem right.

It goes this way. "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field..." (Matthew 13:24) I think Jesus wants us to understand that this is the same sower. After all, he tells them tells the parables back to back, while socially distancing from the crowd, sitting in a boat along that Sea of Galilee seashore. "A sower went out to sow and now, a sower purchased good seed, the best grain he could find and sowed the grain in his field. But as the wheat came up, so did weeds. When the servants saw all the weeds they asked the master, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?" (Matthew 13:28a). "Did you sow good seed or did you try to go with cheap seed? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" (Matthew 13:28b) We've got to do something about this!

The weed in question is well known in Palestine as bearded darnel. They had to be able to identify it because it was poisonous. The challenge was this. When it first comes up, it looks just like wheat. You can't tell the difference. By the time the difference is noticeable, there is a problem. The roots of the bearded darnel surround the roots of the wheat making it nearly impossible to pull up without damaging the good crop. Only when it bears seed can you tell what is wheat and what is bearded darnel. It was a problem in the first century, a devil of a weed. And it is a problem today, all over the world. My weed obsessed grandmother who was a wheat farmer's wife would have called it 'cheat'. It also goes by the name tares, which is how you find it in King James Version, with an "a" not an "e" but it might as well be an "e" because "tares" can strike "terror" when seen by wheat farmers, particularly if you think it was planted by an enemy. I'm sure that explanation caused more than a few eyebrows on the seashore to be raised because when asked where the weeds came from, he says, "An enemy has done this." (Matthew 13:28)

It's an odd thing to say. Darnel was burned as fuel which consumed the seed. Finding enough darnel seed to sow would stretch the imagination of those on the seashore. Salt would have done a better job; that's what the Romans used. But the servants in the parable don't seem to question the logic. They don't express any doubt. If this is the same sower Jesus told his first parable about, they probably thought it was par for the course. They'd watched this guy, throwing seeds on weeds and paths and rocks. He'd sling seed in every direction. This farmer doesn't need enemies sneaking around at night to ruin his harvest. He's perfectly capable of ruining it himself. ²

So they simply ask, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" These servants like pulling weeds. But he surprised them, saying, "No; for in

gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.”
(Matthew 13:29) “No, let’s just let the weeds and the wheat grow together. I love to see stuff grow. It’s too much trouble to go out there and weed that garden. You’re going to slip up and pull some wheat with the weeds. Just leave it. We’ll sort it all out at harvest.”

You know, Jesus may have been a really good carpenter. I like his building metaphor used at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, building on rock instead of sand. But when it comes to agriculture, Jesus isn’t much better at hoeing than he is at sowing. He’s just leaving weeds by the seashore. Of course, Jesus isn’t talking about running a farm. ³

No, he’s talking about this, our world, where good and evil are growing side by side. He’s talking about the good creation that God formed and shaped in 6 days and the weeds that are now growing in it, threatening to take over the place, the suffering, the pain, the injustice, illness, and if we dare, evil that is all around his. The world is a mess. There is bad seed growing right alongside the good. Weeds germinate just as well as wheat. Often you can’t tell the weeds from the wheat until it’s too late to do much about it.

Jesus should know. Why do you think in that Sermon of the Mount, he taught them to pray, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil?” There was plenty of evil in his time. If he had asked any of his disciples, they could have pointed out a dozen social problems that might have been eased by divine intervention: Poverty. Injustice. Prejudice. Prostitution. Oppression. Drunkenness. Drought. Disease. “Look at the world,” they might have said to him. “It’s full of weeds. Surely, this isn’t the way it’s supposed to be! Let’s get rid of the weeds.”

They thought that by overcoming the Romans, re-establishing Israel as a political kingdom, and electing the right man to rule it, everything would be as it should be. They thought that they could fight their way, legislate their way, vote their way into the kind of Kingdom that would please God. They’d get rid of the weeds. But Jesus says in this parable, “No, No. Leave them alone, lest you do damage to the wheat.”

If there is ever a parable for a day like today, it’s this one because, truth be told, when it comes to the evil weeds in our world, we are more than ready to go after them. We may not like to bend over in a garden, but we are quick to roll up our sleeves and attack the weeds among us. Like the servants who see the weeds and wants to pull them up, we would really like to get rid of all the weeds, get rid of the things we see in people who aren’t like us, who are inclined to believe differently, act differently, think differently and speak differently than we.

Over the past few years, but particularly over the past four months, we've developed a litmus test for every social, moral, and ethical position. Most of us see more weeds than wheat. The trouble with this is we risk harming the good things growing in our midst if we become distracted by the weeds. Or even worse, we risk looking and acting more like weeds than wheat.

There is an old proverb that says, "Choose your enemies carefully, because you become like them." How true! It is very easy to become intolerant with intolerant people, or angry at people who are angry at us, or bigoted toward bigoted people. By seeking to destroy our enemies, we usually condemn ourselves because we have become just like them.⁴

If you hate weeding, you might take this as good news. But more than that, if you're overwhelmed by all that is happening in our world, I believe this is good news for how we can live as people of faith in anxious times. Some wise soul has said that the only thing we have much control over is where we focus our attention. Rather than calling us to put on our gardening gloves and attacking what we believe is questionable, we are to be wheat, to do good, to produce good seed, to seek justice, even in a field where weeds abound we are to put all of our energy into being wheat and just leave the weeds alone.

Jesus makes clear in leaving weeds by the seashore that our role as Christians is not to seek out and purge sin and evil in the world. God will tend to that. Our purpose as followers of Jesus is to embody his radical love in everything we do and say, in the best of times and in the worst of times, even if and especially when, we find ourselves planted alongside weeds. That will require some patience on our part, but I might remind you that it is how God treats us. "God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Psalm 86:15)

I will never be like my grandmother, head prayerfully bowed in a garden, pulling weeds. But I am grateful for the image of weeds in heaven. But the preacher had it wrong. It won't be due to her effort; it will be due to His. Or as Jesus put it, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Yes, Lord, pray we listen.

¹ Duncan, King. Pulling Weeds. Retrieved by subscriptions at sermons.com

² Willimon, William. Some Way to Run a Farm. Retrieved by subscriptions at preachingtoday.com.

³ Willimon.

⁴ Crump, Courtney Allen. On Being Wheat. Retrieved at asermonforeverysunday.org.
