

“Wheat and Weeds”  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43  
Sunday, July 17, 2011  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

Zig Ziglar said that he invited a friend to go to church with him. The man answered, “Well, I'd like to go. But the church is so full of hypocrites.” Ziglar replied, “That's okay. There's always room for one more.”

You've heard the saying, the church is not a haven for saints; it's a hospital for sinners. There's nothing different between the people inside the church and the people outside the church, except this: The people inside the church know they are sinners. They know they need Jesus. They know they need God's help, the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit, to get them through the day.

King Duncan shares a hilarious list of, “Politically Correct Ways of Indicating Stupidity,” in his book, Right Choices:

“Perhaps you have heard some of these. They're quite creative. Speaking of someone who has done something really dumb, we might say:

“He's a few clowns short of a circus . . .

“A few fries short of a Happy Meal . . .

“A few peas short of a casserole . . .

“He doesn't have all his corn flakes in one box . . .

“The wheel's spinning, but the hamster's dead . . .

“His antenna doesn't pick up all the channels . . .

“His belt doesn't go through all the loops . . .

“The elevator doesn't go all the way to the top floor . . .

“He is several cards short of a full deck . . .

“If he had another brain, it would be lonely . . .

“Missing a few buttons on his remote control . . .

“The lights are on, but nobody's home . . .

“Some of you kids can't wait to try those on your brother or sister, I know. Have you ever noticed that sometimes people do really dumb things? Why do they do things like that?”

It may have something to do with wheat and weeds.

Last week we talked about planting seeds; this week we're talking about pulling weeds.

The gardeners among us know that planting seeds is far easier than pulling weeds.

It has been said that, “To distinguish flowers from weeds, simply pull up everything.

What grows back is weeds.”

Pulling weeds is not as fun as planting flowers – or wheat! – but it is important.

## **I. Pulling Weeds: Important**

As we go deeper into Jesus' story of the Wheat and the Weeds, it is important to offer a caveat regarding the issue of judging others. Stephen Brown is helpful here. He writes:

“It was F.B. Meyer, I believe, who once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.”

This is so true, don't you agree? We cannot fully know the circumstances that cause another to sin. We barely understand the factors that contribute to our own sin! We are so easily

caught up in habits of bad behavior that we deceive ourselves. We join with the Apostle Paul in saying, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” (Romans 7.19)

We respond to our children in anger when we want to be gentle. We continue in our addiction when we desperately want to stop drinking and using. We are rude to strangers and ignore the needs of loved ones, when we want to be loving and kind. We fill up our time with trivia and loneliness, feeling that our lives are worthless. We feel guilty that our lives lack meaning. We feel helpless to fix our problems: too many bills and too little money; too many family feuds and too few ways to fix them; too much pain in the world and too few honest leaders to make it better.

Philip W. McLarty writes, in his book, The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares:

“One of my favorite theologians, Mr. Rogers, used to say: ‘Have you ever noticed that the very same people who are bad sometimes are the very same people who are good sometimes?’ It reminds me of a story called, ‘Two Wolves.’ It goes like this:

“An old Cherokee once told his grandson about a fight that was going on inside of him. He said it was between two wolves. One was evil: Anger, envy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, gossip, resentment, and false pride. The other was good: Joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather, ‘Which wolf do you think will win?’ The old Cherokee replied, ‘The one I feed.’” (Anonymous)

Pulling weeds is often as simple – and as difficult! – as refusing to “feed” the parts of ourselves that are hurtful to ourselves and to others. Or, to put it another way, when we “feed” the more positive aspects of ourselves and our society, we add goodness to our own lives and to the lives of others.

## **II. Knowing God as Savior: Even More Important**

Even more important than pulling weeds is knowing that God is our Savior. He is at work in the gardens of our souls and our society. God offers saving grace; all we need do is accept and receive it.

Jesus sows good seed among us. The seed bears fruit. There is growth, and promise of an abundant harvest.

William A. Ritter is troubled by the hurry with which some folks label others as “weeds.” He writes:

“I have colleagues who continually want to cull the field, making decisions on the basis of belief ... behavior ... even baptism. As many of you know, my wife is into genealogy. She's traced portions of her family back over 500 years. Just a few months ago, we learned that she had a relative who was burned at the stake in Switzerland. Why? Because he had the wrong understanding of baptism, that's why. They weeded him out. Then they burned him up.

“As for me, I don't always know whether I am weed or wheat. Wasn't it Alexander Solzhenitsyn who said: ‘If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.’ Which, I suppose, includes my heart. For all I know, I may even be the weed in somebody else's garden.

“Perhaps in your garden.”

There's an interesting, somewhat troubling thought. Maybe I am “the weed in somebody else's garden.” And also of interest is Ritter's point that wheat and weed alike grow within each of our hearts. Or, as Solzhenitsyn phrases it, “the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.”

There is a line in the Communion liturgy that brings me to tears every month when we come to it. It follows our Prayers of Confession. I say to you, the congregation, “In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.” And you say to me, your Pastor, “In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.” Only after we have claimed the grace of forgiveness in Christ do we take the bread and the cup together at His table.

We are forgiven – you and me – by Jesus and all that He has done for us, in his life and death and resurrection. We claim His grace and power for ourselves and for the people in our mission field. The people in Yucaipa, Calimesa and Beaumont who haven’t yet found the joy of life in Him.

Some people believe that there are certain folks that are outside the circle of our love and care. That there are certain folks we can ignore.

There’s a story about Billy Graham along these lines, told by Paul Larsen:

“During the Brezhnev era at the height of the Cold War, Billy Graham visited Russia and met with government and church leaders. Conservatives back home reproached him for treating the Russians with such courtesy and respect. He should have taken a more prophetic role, they said, by condemning the abuses of human rights and religious liberty. One of his critics accused him of setting the church back fifty years. Graham listened, lowered his head and replied, ‘I am deeply ashamed. I have been trying very hard to set the church back 2000 years!’”

This is our goal, isn’t it? This is our calling, “to set the church back 2000 years;” to follow the teachings of Jesus with as much faithfulness as we can muster. All people – including the Russians, or whoever we might consider our enemies today – all people are precious in God’s sight. His saving grace, as offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, is available to all people.

### **III. Knowing God's Desire – to Save Us From Sin: Most Important**

“...in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest.”

Most important of all is the knowledge of God's desire – which is to save us from sin.

James Somerville writes about weeds from a slightly different perspective in his book, A World Full of Weeds. I think his story really captures the flavor of Jesus' parable. He writes:

“I asked the people at my last church to imagine what would happen if we adopted a policy of weed-pulling, if we drew a circle around the little town of Wingate, North Carolina, and made a vow that no evil would cross that line, that no weeds would grow within that border. I said, ‘You know, you and I could spend the rest of our lives protecting that boundary, standing shoulder to shoulder with pitchforks and clubs, making sure that we kept drugs and alcohol and pornography and gambling safely on the other side. I think it would take all of our energy and most of our time. But what if we did it? What if we succeeded? What would we have? We would have a town characterized by the absence of evil, which is not the same as a town characterized by the presence of good. And maybe this is what Jesus was talking about all along, that it's better to have a wheat field with weeds in it than a field with nothing in it at all.

“When a church in Wingate, North Carolina, began a ministry to the children of a nearby trailer park, they had to decide what kind of ministry it would be. They could have chosen to root out all the sources of evil in that place -- to chase down the drug dealers and the deadbeat dads, to confiscate handguns and arrest child abusers. Instead, they chose to put up a basketball goal, to tell stories from the Bible, to put their arms around little children, and sing songs about Jesus. And two years after they started that ministry, two years of going out there Saturday after Saturday to do those things, the pastor got a note in his box at church with five words on it:

‘Adrian wants to be baptized.’ Adrian. The terror of the trailer park. That little girl who had made their work most difficult during the previous two years. Who would have guessed? Instead of pulling weeds in the field where she lived, they just tried hard to be wheat, and somehow Adrian saw that and fell in love with it and wanted it for herself. After she was baptized, there was a little more wheat in the field. And because she was there, soon, there was even more.”

### **Closing.**

We are all sinners. By the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we can be saved. And if we live out the faith we receive by grace, children like Adrian, “the terror of the trailer park,” can be saved, too.

Martin Luther once wrote, in a letter to his friend, Philip Melanchthon:

“If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a pretended grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a pretended sin. God does not save people who are pretended sinners. Be a sinner and sin bravely, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more bravely....”

If we are to live fully and freely as human beings, we must sin bravely. We are sinners; to avoid sin we would have to sit shut up in our houses. And even then, we would be committing a sin of omission. Rather, according to Luther, we must “sin bravely, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more bravely...”

May this be true of you. May you live bravely -- with wild freedom and abandon -- in Christ.

Amen.