

“Both Weed & Wheat”

It’s called darnel. You and I have no reason to know that since we’re not Mesopotamia farmers. But the weed Jesus refers to in our parable today is called darnel. It’s a particularly noxious weed for wheat farmers because the darn thing looks exactly like wheat. Same color... same size... same shape. So much so, you can’t tell the difference between wheat and darnel until both are fully formed... when the weight of the wheat tends to bend the stalk, while the darnel stays upright.

What makes darnel even worse, though, is its root structure, which grows longer and stronger than wheat. Meaning any attempt to rip up the darnel will also rip up any wheat around it.

So when Jesus tells his disciples this parable about a sower who sowed good wheat seed in his field, only for some evildoer to come along and plant bad weed seeds amid it... the disciples understood the visual image in a way you and I might not. You simply can’t tell the difference between the weed and the wheat. And even if you could, any attempt to rip up the weed would inevitably also rip up any the good and desirable wheat growing nearby.

The weeds and wheat must co-exist.

.....

Of course, Jesus isn’t telling this parable because he’s interested in wheat production. He’s speaking in parable form, trying to describe the kingdom of heaven to his followers, acknowledging how confusing... how challenging... how upsetting it can be to live in this world that is filled with so much good and evil alike.

For the field of which Jesus speaks is really nothing less than our common “field of humanity.”¹ A field in which there are some who seek to spread love and grace and peace, while others seem intent on lifting up anything but.

And the slaves he speaks of... those who want to run out and rip up the weeds before they can do any damage to the wheat... that’s you and me—the religious community. A people who tend to rush to judgment... a people all too eager to lob labels and stereotype people before ever getting to know them... a people who regularly insist that the only way to deal with what threatens us is to try to get rid of the threat altogether, even if that means harming others who just happen to be in the way.

We may not like it. We may prefer the feeling of self-righteousness that comes amid our condemnation of others. But Jesus isn’t pulling punches. It isn’t our place to judge others. Despite the Church’s history of doing so, the Church isn’t called to be the judge and arbiter between those whom God loves and those God doesn’t. Jesus says that job belongs to God and God alone.

.....

Take Jacob as Exhibit A. In our first lesson Mitch read this morning, we read of Jacob’s dream, in which God tells him point blank, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your (grand)father and the God of Isaac (your father; the land on which you lie I will give to you and

¹ Susannah Davis, http://day1.org/7890-susannah_davis_to_weed_or_not_to_weed

to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

All of this... all of this God promises to Jacob, who up until this point has been a Grade A jerk! A proverbial weed if there ever was one. Up to this point in his life, Jacob had been nothing but a lying, conniving, selfish man who stole his older brother’s birthright by tricking his feeble, blind father. I mean, that’s the only reason Jacob was sleeping on that rock in the first place—he’d ticked off everybody so much he had to flee his home in fear for his life.

And *this* is whom God chooses to bless?! *This* is the one through whom God will continue the covenant originally made with Abraham? Why not Esau, the rightful heir? Why not the one who didn’t lie to his father, who didn’t run away from home like a thief in the night? I don’t know about you, but it’s hard for me to see much worth redeeming in Jacob.

But God did. And for some reason known only to God, God not only choose not to condemn Jacob, but to bless him. And to bless him so fully, so profoundly, that Jacob evolved from a lying, conniving, selfish man into the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Later in his story, God even changes Jacob’s name to Israel—which is why, today, the Hebrew people are also known as the people of Israel.

Jacob—both weed and wheat.

.....

But it’s not just people like Jacob who are both weed and wheat. It’s also people like Carson. Back when I worked as a counselor for children at risk of abuse or neglect, I got to really know Carson and his family. He lived with his single mother and three younger sisters, essentially penniless; barely able to make ends meet. There life, to put to put it mildly, was hard. And I know that, to many, Carson was simply a troubled kid who refused to listen to anyone around him. He didn’t care if you were his teacher, the principal, a police officer, or a counselor. If he didn’t like you, there was nothing you could do to make him listen to you. So at school, he was the kid who never did his homework; who always got detentions for talking back to his teachers; who got suspended for getting into fights.

But what most folks didn’t realize was that the reason Carson struggled to respect or listen to adults around him was because he had been let down by adults his whole life...by his father whom he never met; by his mother who tried but couldn’t keep a stable roof over his head; by the state’s child protective services that didn’t know what to do with him... and the list goes on.

But Carson was also so much more than a disrespectful kid. What most folks didn’t see beyond his tough exterior was a child who loved his family more than life itself. He was a 12 year old son who spent his free time trying to protect his mother from herself. He was an older brother who viewed it as his job to take care of his sisters, and to make sure he and his sisters didn’t get separated from each other. To those who saw this side of Carson, he was smart, he was caring, he was loyal... he was precious.

Carson—both weed and wheat.

.....

And still, it’s not just people like Jacob and Carson—people who look bad on the outside but who are also blessed in ways we don’t always see. It also works the other way around. With

those we assume are the good guys—the wheat—but who prove not-so-good far too much of the time. People like me. One who holds a position of moral authority, but whose morality has proven flawed in the past. One who regularly tries to proclaim the word of God in this very pulpit, but who sometimes struggles to live it out. One who knows that love and love alone is God’s greatest intention for humanity, but who struggles to exhibit it in every relationship. One who is, even right now, preaching a sermon on how dangerous it is to be judgmental against others, but who has lobbed insults and called others names and made unfortunate judgments, and, I’m sure, will again.

Like Jacob—I’ve lied; I’ve deceived; I’ve taken what wasn’t mine while taking advantage of others. Like Carson, I’ve acted out of anger I didn’t fully understand. So there’s Rob—both weed and wheat.

.....

You see, it’s not just our world that is filled with both good and bad—weed and wheat. It is also you and me. We’ve all done that which God calls sin. I know I have and hope you’re honest enough with yourself to admit the same. But the good news Jesus proclaims is that we are blessed with the love and grace of God that redeems and sets us free from our past so that we can grow into the future to which God is still calling us.

So while we’re tempted to say... “Sure... I’ve sinned... but their sins are so much worse.” Or conversely, some might say, “Oh, if you only knew how bad I am you wouldn’t say God loves me,” we need to realize that God’s grace exceeds all of our judgements. God’s love surpasses every one of our boundaries.

So let’s just stop the judging. Let’s stop pretending as if we have any right to play the arbiters of God’s kingdom... as if we have any right to label some good and others as bad, separating some from the love of God we’ve been called to share.

For the truth is, God doesn’t call us to love those we deem worthy. Or those who we even necessarily like. God calls us, clearly and emphatically, to love.

After all, I believe it was the author Ella Wheeler Wilcox who first said, “A weed is but an unloved flower.”