

Don't pull up the weeds  
[Matthew 13:24-30,36-43](#)

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If I am honest, I was not happy when I saw that our gospel this week was about the wheat and the weeds. Oh dear - I thought – here is another opportunity for us to add fuel to the fire in this volatile world when we are all so aware of the weeds that are springing up around us. I can think of many examples of weeds and wheat and of course to make it even more interesting, what one calls a weed, another might consider wheat. How tempted are we right now to separate the weeds from the wheat?

Think about the divide over between those who think we should send our children back to in-person school in the fall and those who don't think we should. Or the divide over whether racism is something to address now or whether we should wait since there is so much else going on. Never mind the divide over masks. Workers who wear their masks all day to keep others safe are struggling with co-workers who take them off. Plenty of opportunities there for us to name some as wheat and others as weeds.

Maybe this is why Jesus tells this story because naming or separating is exactly what the servants want to do when they find out that the enemy has planted weeds in the good seed that was planted. But the Master says no - for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

I had a good reminder of this a couple weeks ago. I was at the yacht club waiting for a friend to take a socially distant sail and I was looking at the planters which had not been planted this year because of the pandemic. In one was a purple petunia that was growing – a volunteer as gardeners like to say. However, right next to it was a weed. I couldn't help myself.

I went over to pull at the weed only to find out that it was well entrenched and all mixed up in the petunia's roots. I thought I should leave this alone and actually remembered this parable. However, 10 min later when my friend still hadn't arrived, I went back over and pulled it up with the petunia along with it. I separated them and replanted the petunia. I gave it some water from my water bottle and knew it was going to rain in a few days. I told myself that the petunia was going to be alright. I thought of it as I was writing my sermon and went to look at it last Wednesday. The petunia was completely dead. I couldn't enjoy the purple flowers from this one small plant anymore.

In this parable, Jesus is reminding us that if we pull up the weeds we see around us, we can do damage. We will remove the wheat as well. What the Master says next is really challenging. 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.”

Let them grow together? What! That is really hard for most of us to hear because we want to get rid of those weeds. Instead, we are to wait until the harvest when the reapers will collect the weeds and burn them and then the wheat will be harvested. Jesus explains the meaning of the parable that harvest time is the end of the age – I like to say the coming of the kingdom of God and that angels will be sent to separate the wheat from the weeds. We are to leave the separating work up to God.

Now this does not mean that we should not fight against injustice or stand up to evil in this world or ask someone to put on their mask when we cannot move away from them. What it means is that we cannot condemn or exclude the other person or stop listening to them. We don't get to de-humanize or demonize the other. We don't know their heart. Only God does. The master says, "Let them grow together." If we are honest, all of us are mixtures of wheat and weeds – growing together. All of us are depending on the grace of God to nurture the wheat – the good within us – and winnow out the weeds – the evil.

While we wait on God's work and the coming of God's kingdom, how do we deal with weeds and wheat growing together in our lives? For me it takes prayer and reminders in scripture just like we have today. We truly do not know what is in another's heart. We don't know about the small wheat plant that God is nurturing there. All we may see is the tall weeds seemingly choking everything in sight.

I want to share a story of how someone came to see the wheat after first only seeing weeds. This weekend we mourned the death of two Civil Rights heroes, the Rev. CT Vivian and John Lewis. There was an article<sup>1</sup> about John Lewis which shared the story of how every year John Lewis travelled to Selma, Alabama to commemorate the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, an event in 1965 where he and other protesters were beaten by Alabama state troupers while they prayer. He sustained a skull fracture, but managed to escaped. Over time, as he visited John watched attitudes change. At a ceremony in 1998, Joseph T. Smitherman, who had been Selma's segregationist mayor back then and was still mayor — though a repentant one — gave Mr. Lewis a key to the city. This was the same mayor who called in the state troupers. Mr. Smitherman said of Mr. Lewis. "Back then, I called him an outside rabble-rouser, Today, I call him one of the most courageous people I ever met." Mr. Smitherman finally recognized the wheat growing in the man before him.

As you deal with the weeds around in this world especially in this time when many are weary and frustrated in this ongoing pandemic, look for the wheat in others. You may have to look hard and remember that the growing of that wheat is God's work and God can make growth happen in the midst of weeds. Sometimes we can see the growth and sometimes we can help. If it is not dangerous to you, stay connected to those you see

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/us/john-lewis-dead.html>

the weeds in. Listen as best as you can. Pray. Our God is a loving God and full of grace, and we never know how God is working.

As you look at your own heart and deal with the weeds growing there, ask how God is working in you nurturing the wheat that is in you. Give yourself over to that process even though it can be painful and time consuming and see how God is transforming you. In the end, know that God is within all of us and in this beautiful yet messy world forming us into wheat-filled human beings who will be part of God's kingdom. Trust that God can and is doing that work and pray that you enter into it with all your heart.