

7.17.22 – Pentecost 6
“Burning the Weeds”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Hebrews 10:12-15 (NLT) ~ Pam

¹² But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. ¹³ There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. ¹⁴ For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so.

L: These are Words from God. C: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 13:24-30 (GNT) ~ Pam

The Parable of the Weeds

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ One night, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, then the weeds showed up. ²⁷ The man's servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ ‘It was some enemy who did this,’ he answered. ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ they asked him. ²⁹ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.’”

L: These are the Teaching Words of Jesus! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we thank you for our time together. As we continue to study the parables of Jesus, we ask you to stimulate our imaginations, clarify our thinking, nourish our souls, and bring us closer to you in the material. Strengthen our hope and faith to know that though there may be figurative weeds among the plants, you will sort them for us. Lord, may we be attentive today and every day, listening for your direction as the Holy Spirit speaks through this messenger. Amen.

You may have noticed on the back of the music lyrics are printed instructions I’ve shared throughout this month of parables study. I hope you will take the time each day to try this discipleship method of going deeper into the stories. It is for your spiritual development as well as for this church, as we “Listen for the Work.” We are seven months into the year, and God is revealing his direction to each of us. We have five more

months of discernment, so please use this method and the prayer tools we learned before Easter. Please share your insights with me!

The Hebrews passage is here to remind us that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross established a new covenant that brought salvation to those who love God. Through that perfect one-time sacrifice, we are forgiven; no longer would the temple rituals of animal sacrifices be required. He was the perfect sacrifice on the cross. Jesus came from the presence of God himself, and because of his perfection, we are made Holy. Not all at once of course; through his atonement for our sins, we are sanctified; and through daily sanctification (i.e., spiritual growth), Jesus assures us of our eternal life both here on earth and in eternity. We are forgiven.

Jesus too was speaking to the Jews who followed him. The parables used common language and experiences like the farmer who scattered the seed in four different types of soil in last week's message. These images of daily life made some sense to his hearers and to the disciples without directly criticizing the religious leaders who felt threatened by Jesus' teachings of "new covenant." But the crowds did not fully receive Jesus' teaching of faith and understanding (in them, his words did not fall on fertile soil), so Jesus did not reveal the truth to them.

Each of the parables in Matthew 13 describe the "Kingdom of God," in this clever way, so I imagine that the disciples had to ask Jesus to expound on the teaching. You can read his interpretation in Verses 36-43. As you can see in the painting on the cover of the bulletin, this farmer is a wealthy landowner with workers. This main character has authority, so this parable portrays him with Godly authority and divine symbolism. Even so, it was common to have competition among landowners; some

farmers fought over land and encroachment of crops and seed. Our context is that expensive, good seed **was** planted in the fields, yet as the plants began to grow, dangerous and poisonous “tares” in the King James Version (weeds in most other translations) began to grow among the good seed. The weed, “poisonous bearded darnel,” looks like wheat and grows to the same height as wheat. Its effects can be quite severe, causing “drunkenness” of a sort: staggering, impaired speech, trembling, vision defects, and confusion. Bearded darnel, *lolium temulentum*, is a common weed, found in fields and waste ground throughout the world, but particularly in the Middle East. At harvest time, wheat bends while this particular weed remains erect, and the seed heads may attain a darker color than the wheat grain.

In Verse 28, the exuberant workers assume it was a competitive farmer who sabotaged their fields, “the enemy,” so they want to pull the weeds out of their fields immediately, assuming the weeds will decimate their crops; but the landowner/farmer says no, wait until harvest, when the difference between the wheat and the darnel is more obvious. Then pull the weeds first, bundling them carefully (to prevent sickness in livestock or the workers), and then throw them into the fire for fuel. Interesting that there is still a purpose for this weed. Only then can they safely harvest the wheat.

If you’ve been in church most of your life, you know the wheat and weeds are metaphors for types of Jesus’ listeners: wheat stalks are believers and followers of Christ’s teaching; the weeds are evil or wicked men among them. Remember this is a Kingdom and judgment parable. Jesus is indirectly calling those who put the institution (the dishonest,

arrogant religious leaders who oppressed the poor) above Him “wicked.” Some of the disciples wanted to purge the new growing church of **unfaithful** members; but Jesus reminds them that judgment is God’s job. Besides, they may be useful in the end (like the weeds were useful as fuel in the burning of them). Jesus’ story tells the followers that evil will always be with them, and they are to co-exist as God created and man’s free will determines. Only at harvest, i.e., judgment, will God separate good from evil. The true “enemy” in the story (the one who planted weeds of wickedness) is Satan, not a competitor. Hell will be the consequence for the wicked, while Heaven the reward for believers.

Haven’t you made or heard exclamations of “what’s going on in our world, today?!” Don’t we want to cleanse the world of evil? Any of you ever watch the Tom Cruise movie, “Minority Report?” It was a future world where evil behaviors were predicted and prevented, and though not biblical in origin, there are parallels to our story about flawed humans not being the judge and the importance of letting both grow together until the harvest (God’s judgment).

Okay, you gardeners. You may understand this analogy better: we have something called mondo grass, dark green, grass-like leaves, a groundcover, or low border trim. We planted it between patio stones instead of concrete, and it is beautiful; but when we first put it in, other weeds grew up from the soil too – clover, buttonwood, chickweed, and crabgrass. As I dutifully pulled out the weeds, the mondo grass still immature, came out too! Had to replant it. Finally, I realized I had to let them grow together until the mondo grass was firmly rooted in the soil. The weeds’ roots were weak the following year, so it was easier to pull

them out then without hurting the mondo grass. This perennial had stronger roots. I am sure you have your own stories to add to this symbolism. The courtyard has morning glories, Virginia creeper, and crabgrass you can't really pull out until it's large enough. Yet weeds with flowers provide pollen for bees and birds.

How can you interpret this for the church? We are NOT to sterilize the church by removing all evil. We are called to be in the world, not of the world. There will be evildoers among us in our neighborhoods and yes, even in churches. If sinners cannot go to church, then we are in trouble! We are not all saints, and you know it. We are NOT to judge one another here or anywhere else unless we are called to do so on a jury. That's difficult I know; we believers sometimes feel superior to the unbelieving, yet no, we are to be salt and light in this dark world. We are to be strong wheat plants, trusting in God's creative plan for us and our roles to nourish others with the Word in the world. If we keep an eye on our own spiritual selves, we will not have time to judge others. This story is about the grace of God and our trust in Him or lack thereof.

The general harvest of the good will be in the future; Jesus is also preparing the disciples for the cross and punishment he will suffer. The disciples have no idea yet what to expect, so he is slowly preparing them for his death, resurrection, and yes, even his second coming. “⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen! (Matt. 13:43).” Not a word about **speaking** your judgment! Have faith, patience, and trust God in all things. Amen! |/

Will you pray with me? Lord, help us to be more tolerant, aware, and hope-filled disciples. You have sowed the best seed for us, so let us be faithful in waiting for the harvest. Help us to share the gospel with others,

even the wicked, so that they may know you. You will burn the weeds when it is time to do so. Let us not be poisoned by the evil in our world but let us show love and grace. Let us learn from the difficult experiences of life. Give us direction, oh Lord, **Amen.**