

## "LETTING GOD DO THE WEEDING"

Matthew 13:24-30

Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill

Babcock Presbyterian Church

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I hate weeding! Especially when it's hot and humid, the earth is dry and hard, and the weeds refuse to budge.

My hatred for weeding goes back to when my mother forced me outside on hot summer days to pull weeds in her flower garden. **"How long do I have to weed?" "At least an hour."** That was the dead give away. She didn't care about the weeds she just wanted me out of the house. So I went outside and reluctantly pulled weeds thinking to myself, "How can I get myself out of this?"

Finally, I came up with a plan. I started to pull up her precious flowers along with the weeds. Not her day lilies and snap dragons, that would be too obvious. No, I was clever, I only pulled up those flowers that looked like weeds, then I could plead ignorance and say, **"Gee Mom, I couldn't tell the difference!"** That was the last time I was ever asked to weed. But I didn't go unpunished. I also pulled up several clumps of poison ivy. I couldn't tell the difference.

In Jesus' parable of the weeds among the wheat, the Master kept his farm hands from going out into his fields to pull weeds, because he was afraid they'd pull up the wheat too. Apparently there is a certain type of weed that looks just like a shaft of wheat. You can't tell the two apart.

That's why the Master cautioned his field hands to hold off, bringing us now to one of the points of this parable: like the field hands who would innocently confuse the wheat and the weeds, church people are prone to confuse our call to nurture God's people with weeding out other people. Why? Because we play god and pass judgment on those we don't think belong. Certainly this is the root of the problem in trouble spots around the world.

Another thing we fail to do is tell the difference between the weeds and the wheat in our own lives. We confuse the old self (who you have become outside of God's grace) with the new self (who God wants you to be when you claim your true identity as a child of God.) Part of being a disciple is learning the difference between the two and then making the hard choices as you decide whether or not you let your life get smothered by the wild weeds growing in your life or you intentionally nurture the healthy wheat, or the presence of Christ trying to grow within you.

One of the things I notice every summer is that those things in my lawn and garden I don't want there, and I mean weeds, grow like wild fire. You pull weeds one day and sooner than later they're back with a vengeance. On the other hand, those things I want to grow quickly like new grass and flowers, seem to take forever, and a lot of hard work. If you stop nurturing your flowers,

they slowly die, if you don't pull weeds, they'll take over.

The same is true in your life. Bad habits, sinful attitudes and impulses are always there, and if you don't watch out, they'll take over and rob you of your identity as a child of God. You will then become self-centered, and self-important.

Have you ever watched the British sit com, "**Keeping Up Appearances?**" Hyacinth Bucket is a social climber. One day she was incensed because a neighbor told her she was going on a month long cruise in the Caribbean. "**That woman is a snob,**" Hyacinth complained to her long suffering husband, Richard. "**She thinks she is superior to everybody else, which makes it harder for those of us who really are.**"

There's the problem. We think our neighbors think they're superior to us, so weed them out! Throughout church history there've been inquisitions and religious wars to settle accounts, so much so it seems the church has been better at weeding out than nurturing in the Kingdom's garden.

I'm not advocating we shouldn't stand up against the false teachings and heresies that are forever creeping into our churches. But while we strive to keep the faith pure, we shouldn't try to keep the membership rolls pure. We need to remember we're all sinners with both weeds and wheat growing side by side in our souls. So instead of building walls that separate us from each other, we should be building bridges to each other.

One of the reasons Jesus had such a hard time with many of the Pharisees was because they were wall builders. All their ceremonies and strict rules were designed to separate themselves from everybody else. In fact, in English, "Pharisee" means separatist. The original intention was good and noble. The Pharisees originally formed themselves because the Jewish culture was being diluted by Greek culture, ideas and religion. So the Pharisees separated themselves to be different, as a reminder to the people of the covenant God formed with Israel.

Unfortunately subsequent generations of Pharisees confused the word different with better. If you took the time and effort to be a Pharisee somehow you must love God more than most, so you had to be superior causing you to resented anyone who thought otherwise. That's why so many of the Pharisees came to hate Jesus. Like Hyacinth Bucket they said, "**He thinks he's superior to everybody else, which makes it harder for those of us who really are.**"

Jesus taught this parable so you and I don't fall into the same trap. As disciples our job is to be Christ to our neighbor, that is, you let the love of Christ pass through you to those around you, at home, in your neighborhood, at work. Remember what St. Francis of Assisi said, "**Always be ready to preach the gospel, if necessary, use words.**" In other words, let your life be a sermon.

Unfortunately, a lot of our friends and neighbors have a bad perception of organized religion in general and Christians in particular. I've told you before about those man-on-the-street interviews I've seen on You Tube. Too many people don't go to church today because they think

you and I are hypocrites. They don't see the wheat, only the weeds. Of course, a lot of their perceptions are fueled by movies and television shows that portray Christians in a bad light. So we have a challenge. We have to prove them wrong. We have to work even harder, nurture our personal relationships with Jesus so he can grow in our lives and crowd out all our weeds.

And the way you begin to do this is through prayer. Prayer is the way you nurture the wheat and crowd out the weeds. Diligent prayer, scripture study and meditation prepares you to be more like Jesus. And the more you take time every day to pray to nurture your personal relationship with God, the more you learn to trust. You realize your life is completely dependent, not on your own will power, but the saving grace of Jesus Christ. So remember, prayer is the key that opens the gate to a field where the wheat is slowly, but surely growing overtaking the weeds in your life.

And here's where the trust comes in. Here's where this parable may give you a sense of comfort. Jesus says, **"Don't worry about them and don't try to pull them up because your may pull up the good stuff."** All of us have buried deep in our souls weeds that cause us heartache and pain, maybe even self-loathing. It keeps us from fully enjoying God, our neighbors and ourselves. It gnaws at you constantly and you want to weed it out. But Jesus says, **"You didn't plant those weeds, your enemy did. You didn't ask for them, but you got them. So, this is what I want you to do. Trust me. That's right, trust me. Let the weeds alone. Leave them to me and when the harvest comes, remember, I love you weeds and all. Just Trust me."**

God knows better than you what can and cannot be changed in you. And God simply wants you to know that. You are not expected to be perfect. You have weeds so learn to live with them.

Remember the serenity prayer?

**"God grant me the serenity, to accept what I cannot change,  
the courage to change what I can and  
the wisdom to know to know the difference."**

So stop pulling those weeds, that is trying to improve yourself by yourself. Instead give yourself a break. Remember, by grace we are saved, God loves you anyway, so let go and let God love you into the Kingdom.

Let us pray!