

THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 19, 2026

In last week's Gospel reading, you heard that Jesus went out to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, got into a boat as great crowds gathered on shore to listen to him teach about a Sower who sowed seeds in his field. That was the first of four stories he would teach them that day; parables about ordinary life in Galilee. He would also speak about weeds growing up among wheat, and mustard seeds, and yeast.

I believe that as he looked at the faces in front of him that day, he decided on these four specific parables to teach them. The crowd was made up of many who were hungry and open to hear anything Jesus had to say. There were also those there who came with their own various set agendas; and some whose minds were already made up about the coming messiah; their hearts now closed to any new truth. And then there were those present who were looking for Jesus to say something heretical or subversive so they could report back to their leaders. And then there were those in attendance who desperately needed physical or mental healing.

We still have all those kinds of people around today; walking our streets, living in our neighborhoods, sitting in our churches. They include you and me. Oh, we are not like all these people every day. But over the course of days and weeks and months, these various kinds of people can show up in your life and mine.

There are times in each of our lives, when we are so hungry, and so longing, and open, to whatever Jesus needs to teach us, no matter how radical his teaching may sound to us at the time. There can be times that we come to

him, carrying our own set of hidden agendas. There are times when we come, having already made up our minds on what the truth is, and so, consequently, our hearts are closed to hearing that new strange fresh word from our Lord. I know these people reside in you, because they reside in me.

As Jesus looked out at who was in the crowd, he saw his dear devoted disciples sitting close by, supporting him; those men and women willing to die for his cause of justice and freedom. There were also those whose hearts, though deeply moved by his teaching, were not yet ready to fully commit to his cause; the cause of his Father's kingdom. There were emissaries of the scribes and Pharisees present. Jesus saw them secretly taking notes. There were those who just liked a good show; and there was no better show in town at that time than this radical prophet and teacher Jesus.

After talking to them about a Sower who sowed seeds in his field, Jesus turned to the topic of wheat and weeds. He said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a person who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the plants sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared." These weeds were Darnel, a poisonous weed, which in the early stages, looked very much like wheat.

In Shakespeare's *Natural History*, he says this about Darnel: "Among the hurtful weeds, Darnel is the first. They grow in fields among wheat and barley of the corrupt and bad seed. They spring and flourish with the corn. The new bread wherein Darnel is eaten, hot, causeth drunkenness; in like manner doth beer or ale wherein the seed is fallen, or put into the malt.

Darnel hurteth the eyes, and maketh them dim, if it happen in corn either for bread or drink.” Yes, Darnel is indeed, nasty stuff!

As Jesus looked out at the crowd of people, his heart broke as he saw some Darnel scattered there among the wheat; weeds an enemy had planted among his followers. He told the people that the landowners servants came to him about this problem of weeds among the wheat. They asked what they should do. Should they go right away and try to pull out all the darnels from the field? The landowner replied: “Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, but then gather the wheat into my barn.’” The wheat and the weeds were allowed to grow together until the harvest; grow together in the field; grow together in the crowds listening to Jesus that day; grow together in the church.

As Jesus sat in the boat looking at the people, I wonder which ones he knew were acting more wheat like that day; those who were open to the values of his father’s kingdom. And those who were acting more like the weeds? Some there looked downcast, with no doubt in their minds that they were weeds, that they had been rejected by God. Those beautiful children of Abraham who, according to the Law of Moses, and societies rules at the time, were not allowed to attend synagogue and be present in polite social gatherings. They hungered and yearned, in an open and pure way, for what Jesus had to offer them. But they were certain that they were on the outside looking in; certain, that they were beyond God’s redemption, sadly, not knowing that they were deeply loved by God, and held deep within God’s heart; that they were in fact, precious wheat.

But there were some there as well, who were certain that they were among the wheat; among God’s elect. They were obedient to the very last letter of

the Law of Moses. They were welcomed, and even honored guests at many social gatherings. But Jesus could read the pride and confidence and certainty on their faces; and in deep sadness, knew that their hearts were not open to the deeper mysteries and challenges inherent in the glorious reign of God. They did not know that they were presently acting more like the weeds.

But what broke Jesus' heart the most, was the knowledge that even his closest followers; those who had traveled the many weary miles with him were currently acting more like weeds, than like the wheat. Dear Judas Iscariot was one of them. Judas, the financier; Judas the keeper of the communal purse. The righteous and devout and faithful son of the covenant. Sadly, Judas was more faithful to the Law of Moses; the old Covenant; and to the ways that the society around him functioned, than to some of the radical ways of Jesus' new reign of God. Judas' heart had become clouded by the ways of the religious and social culture around him; hindering him from seeing the truth more clearly.

As I look back at my life, there have been times when I was absolutely certain that I was among the wheat. Times when I have been Judas. Times when I have been absolutely certain of the truth, and confident that I was numbered among the few elect. There have also been moments when I thought I was a weed; when I believed that I had to earn God's favor, and was coming up short on God's spreadsheet. Moments of insecurity and uncertainty and struggle.

We must never be too uncertain, nor too confident, about where we stand before God. We never really know all the inner workings of our hearts and minds and motives. Sometimes when we think we are drawing closer to God, we may in fact be drifting away; and sometimes when we feel that we

are drifting away, we are in fact, drawing closer. I am thankful for the words God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah: "I, the Lord, probe into people's minds. I examine people's hearts." God alone knows our mind. God alone knows the inner workings of our hearts, and desires to reveal this to us, if we take time to listen. And deeply listening is a difficult task in today's world of activity and noise.

Ultimately our life in God has nothing to do with striving to be wheat and not weeds. It has everything to do with continually listening closely within us where God dwells, and where God longs to teach us. May we be healthy wheat who are open to listen; open to grow.