

The parable of the wheat and the weeds, or called in olden days, the parable of the wheat and the tares, is not entirely foreign to our experience. You plant the garden then weeds come up the next day. You mop the floor and then the kid spills juice. You pay off the mortgage then you find out that the house needs major structural repairs.

So we too might wonder along with the servants, “**Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?**” We might complain that the weeds are eating up the crops, or that 1. (oops!) Tares are tearing through our field!

What we’ve experienced in this life is that there is always bad thrown in with good, a few rotten eggs along with the fresh ones, and there always seems to be flies in the ointment.

And we know the enemy has done this, the parable tells us this itself. Evil and sin comes from the devil and when our sinful nature inclines us toward evil. This shouldn’t be a surprise. But we ask God, what are you going to do about it? The servants propose a solution: “**So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’**” In short, the master answers “No.”

2. (ugh!) The master doesn't seem to care about the tares. If anything would be good to nip in the bud, it would be this. Tares are easier to weed out when they’re young, before they can multiply and do real harm to crops, right? Mark Twain said if it is your job to eat a live frog, do it in the morning so the rest of the day will be smooth sailing. The servants are right in suggesting a proactive solution, right?

But that’s not our master’s solution, and this is our problem. Jesus tells us stories and teaches us lessons of this Kingdom of Heaven, but it seems like a pretty lame kingdom. The king is a wandering Jewish preacher who has a rag-tag team of fishermen and tax collectors. He does miracles, but not for everyone. He has spiritual things to say, but not spiritual things that the religious leaders want to hear.

The Church is not immune. What’s the latest scandal that has rocked the church? I’m sure you can make a list of pastors who have had to step out of the ministry because of accusations and indictments of unchristian behavior. Sure, some churches have bells and whistles, shiny marble and granite, and golden decorations and communionware. But all that glitters isn’t gold. Even the cleanest and brightest of churches can have a dark underside.

And laypeople aren’t always better. Christians don’t always act like Christians. They can act like tares rather than wheat. They can be the bad apples spoiling the bunch. They can be the hypocrites who say one thing and do the opposite.

So Lord, why not do some weeding? Why not tear out some tares? They're really a bother to us genuine Christians who fly straight and level. Let's excommunicate the hypocrites so we can make for a bumper crop of saints. We may wonder with the disciples who said of a village that rejected Jesus, "**Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?**"

We live a life of wheat among tares, good apples among bad, and fresh eggs among rotten ones. The Master knows this, and He gives us an answer, and He gives us a reason. "**But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' '""** 3. (aha!) The master doesn't want a tare to tear out the wheat.

It's not that the Lord is a live and let live kind of guy who lets anything go. It's rather that you are so precious in His sight, that it is worth it to suffer the tares so that you are not torn away from Him. **THE LORD HAS US ENDURE EVIL SO THAT NOT ONE OF HIS ELECT WOULD BE LOST.**

Jesus said elsewhere, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**" God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die and be buried for us like a grain of wheat. Our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He would rather have His beloved Son suffer sin, death, and hell so that you don't have to. And indeed, Jesus Christ has done this for you.

It's not enough that you plant a grain of wheat into the ground, it has to grow! Indeed, when Jesus was planted into the ground, He sprouted up again, and we are the fruit of His death and resurrection. We can gladly rejoice as we are the Lord's pleasant planting. We are the crop of wheat awaiting the harvest.

Because the fact of the matter is that 4. (whee!) Tares look a lot like wheat. Based on the specific word used in this parable, many scholars believe that we know the specific kind of weed that was planted in that field. Namely, darnel. Darnel looks a lot like wheat, it even grows deeper roots than wheat, so if you try to weed out the darnel, it will most certainly take some wheat with it. One major difference, instead of producing a golden-brown wheat berry, darnel produces black grains which are poisonous and can make you sick if you eat one.

So that's just it, isn't it? We won't know until the harvest, will we? Until Christ comes again, the Christians who we thought were hypocrites may actually be the wheat, and the Christians we thought were perfect saints might be the weeds: darnel masking as wheat.

And so, there is room to give people the benefit of the doubt. We don't know everything. Rather than treating unbelievers as enemies, we can treat them as those who do not yet know Christ. Rather than trying to weed out what we might

consider tares in our midst, we can encourage them in their faith walk, walk alongside them in their weaknesses, and gently to call them to live like the Christians they say they are.

And that's what the Church is, right? It's a bunch of sick people pointing others to where the medicine is. It's beggars who can tell other beggars where the bread of life is. The Church is "...the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel" (AC VII 1) for the express purpose of delivering the clearest good news, the richest forgiveness, and the most precious grace.

When wheat looks like tares and flowers look like weeds, it's easy for us the not yet matured wheat to understand life as a tare, to know the sin struggles of those around us, to experience the pain of feeling lost, and to suffer through our own imperfections. We don't have to ask, "what if?" When God is one of us, just a stranger on a bus, we can know that He knows what this life is like with its disappointments, struggles, and pains.

One of my favorite songs tells the story of a young boy who picks a bouquet of flowers for his mom. The only thing is that the "flowers" he picks are dandelions in a field. Anyone else would have considered those weeds, but instead the mother takes the bouquet and puts them in a vase. The chorus goes, "Lord, search, my heart, create in me something clean, dandelions, you see flowers in these weeds."

The point is this as it applies to our parable today: we have a God who doesn't just consider weeds to be flowers, but through the transformational love of Christ, dandelion is turned into wheat, weeds are turned into flowers, sinners are turned into saints, the unrighteous are made righteous, and the dead are made alive. Through faith in Christ as a free gift of God, tares are turned into wheat, so don't tear them out, the story hasn't yet run its course! It's not yet too late!

5. (yeah!) Our gracious God will sort it all out. Evil is still real, and the tares still terrorize the wheat. But with these promises of God, we have room to be gracious and loving toward others. The Lord will gather us from the four corners of the Earth like wheat into His barn. The day will come when the heads of grain will appear and it will be as clear as day who are the weeds and who are the wheat. Until then, we can trust that our gracious God will sort it all out even as He watches over us every day of our lives. There's still hope for those who we think are beyond saving, and there's even still hope for us, sinners who have been redeemed by a savior who doesn't want a single one of His wheat to perish, but desires that all people be saved. Amen!