

Albany Presbyterian Church

July 19th 2026, Matthew 13:24-43, Psalm 86:11-17 Wheat and the Weeds

Last week, we reflected on one of Jesus' parables in Matthew 13: the parable of the seed and the Sower. It was set in the context of Jesus' early ministry, with many religious authorities and teachers of the law rising in opposition to Jesus and his teaching, while his popularity grew and large crowds gathered around him wherever he went.

Jesus told the first parable, the parable of the Sower. The seed is the message of the Kingdom of God. The Sower is Christ, and the soil is our hearts that receive the word of God. The seed is not only scattered on the good soil but also falls on the path, the rocky ground, or the thorny ground. The parable teaches us that when our hearts are hardened, full of distractions and worries about life and our wealth, they can get in the way of our truly receiving the gospel and growing in faith. And so, we must always be on guard, to be good soil, rid ourselves of all that gets in the way, through repentance and prayer and study and understanding God's word, so we may bear fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty, and thirty times as much as what was sown.

Today, we read the second parable. Jesus told his disciples, once again using the image of the seed, the Sower, and the field. Yet this is a completely different message about the Kingdom of God.

There was a farmer who had a good field and decided to grow wheat, so he sowed good wheat seeds, but after it was finished, his enemy came secretly and sowed poisonous weeds among the wheat.

When his servants saw the weeds growing among the wheat, they asked if he would want them to pull up the weeds. The weed that often grows with wheat is a grassy weed that looks exactly like the wheat, making it nearly impossible to tell them apart. And pulling them up early will definitely uproot the young, fragile wheat.

The farmer said, "Because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them." "Leave them be; let both grow together until the harvest." "And at the harvest, first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, and then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

And later in verse 36, his disciples asked Jesus to explain this parable. The one who sows is the Son of Man, referring to Jesus himself; the field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. And that the day of judgement, when Jesus, the Son of Man, will send out his angels-his servants, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. The evil ones will be thrown into the blazing furnace, and the righteous will be lifted up and will shine like the Sun in the Kingdom of God.

I think this is one of the most powerful stories that explains the world we live in. In the world where both wheat and weeds exist, there is both good and evil. It answers the age-old theological question: *if God is good, why does he allow evil to exist in our world?*

It makes us think. Firstly, what is evil? The Greek word for "evil and evildoer" in this passage is: "*poiountas ten anomian*." Where "Nomos" means law or Torah; "a" is a prefix added to the word, meaning no. Therefore, the meaning of "evil" and "evildoer" is all those who do not keep the commandments or Torah, and those who will cause others to do the same. What is the commandment? "Loving God with all your hearts and loving your neighbours" (Matthew 22:37-40, Deut.6:5, Leviticus 11:18).

Secondly, the word "devil," the doer of evil, appears three other times in Matthew. Once again, in Matthew 4, Jesus was tempted by the devil, and in chapter 16, Peter was called the devil, who got in the way of Jesus fully participating in the ministry as the Son of God. Finally, at 25:41, the devil is mentioned in the sheep and the goats, where the goats are condemned for their inability to act in loving God and loving their neighbour, and as the one for whom eternal fires are prepared.

And Jesus uses the word enemies and it appears three other times in the gospel: firstly, in Matthew 5:43, "Love your enemies"; secondly, in 10:36, where Jesus says one's enemies will be members of one's own family; and thirdly, in Matthew 22:44, taken from Psalm 110:1, "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." But the enemy in our passage is, as Jesus said, the devil, who came to sow the children of the evil one.

That is to say, the enemies, or the evildoers, are not as easily identifiable as we would like them to be.

4th-century church father and bishop St. Augustine said that the church is a *Corpus Per Mixtum*, a mixed body of genuine believers and unbelievers or sinners coexisting side by side, wheat and weeds. We know that most of his ministry was spent defending the church against heresies and many political conflicts. He became convinced that evil is intertwined with the good in the world. In that none of us is able to perfectly separate the righteous from the wicked. Only God can. God is the only judge.

So, as the author of Psalm 86, when we grow weary and overwhelmed by the evil in our world when “Arrogant foes who attack me, O God, ruthless people trying to kill me who have no regard for you.” We turn to God in prayer, saying, “Hear my prayers, and answer me, guard my life, strengthen my faith, turn to me, and have mercy on me, save me, give me a sign of your goodness, help me and comfort me.”

Harold Kushner, the author of “When Bad Things Happen to Good People,” reflects on our experience of evil and suffering in the world through his loss of his young son. And he concludes that though there is evil and suffering in the world, there is also the all-powerful, loving and compassionate God. And that God is not limited in what he does, nor does He plan for the suffering for some sort of lessons to be learnt. God, in the place of evil and our suffering, stands with us, be our strength and our refuge.

We are completely and utterly dependent on God. It is to God we belong. We also have confidence in God, from whom the good seed comes, who will make us grow strong and resilient, even in the presence of evil, until the harvest time. And that He allows evil for the sake of safety for those who belong to him. Not only do we have confidence in God, but we also trust in God’s justice, even as evil grows around us. When the harvest comes, the evil and all those who caused sin will be bundled up to be burned in the eternal fire, and we will be gathered to enter the Kingdom of God and shine like the Sun.

God is loving; He is most gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. He will protect us from evil. God will bless us with living faith to grow, mature and bear the fruit He desires.

So be aware of the presence of evil, but do not worry or grow weary of it, for God, who knows everything and to whom we belong, will take care. For we are the children of the living God, growing and bearing fruit in loving God and loving our neighbour, and praying always for discernment of the Spirit to deepen our love for God and for one another. As Paul says in Philippians 1:6, be confident that He who began a good work in you will complete it in you until the day of his return. Amen.