

Pentecost 8 – July 23, 2023

Text: Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Theme: There are Weeds in Our Wheatfield

**Several years ago, Danya and I got very industrious and planted a huge garden. We were going to have fabulous produce throughout the summer. The problem was that the boys were busy with sports and friends and Danya and I were working and then there was the matter of some vacation weeks and a youth trip and pretty soon the fabulous garden looked like a South American jungle. Weeds of every variety had found our garden. Have you ever tried to separate a cucumber vine from a Morning Glory? It's nigh on impossible.**

**In our Gospel we have a man who spent time and money planting a field that would yield a great harvest and feed his family, but it wasn't that he was neglectful of his fields like we were. Sometime in the night, one of his enemies launched an insidious counterattack. He intentionally planted weeds in his field to ruin his crop. Sadly, I couldn't find any such enemy in our case. We were just bad gardeners.**

**Jesus explained this parable to his disciples and he said that we are the wheat and the weeds are the evil ones sewn among us. Evil people and evil things that seek to hurt us do not wear big signs or uniforms. They are not always easy to spot and sometimes they do significant damage to us before we even are aware of what is being done. And the thing is this – there is nothing we can do about it. We like to think we can**

**control life, but evil is insidious and we are often helpless in its grasp at the time.**

**Sometimes the evil is a person. That person seeks to ruin your reputation, or take your job or your family, or hurt you physically, mentally, or spiritually. Whatever it is, that person seeks to do you harm. Sometimes, he is under the cover of innuendo and suggestion or being legally right even if morally wrong. In the end, he is evil like the man sewing weeds into the field in the dead of night.**

**Sometimes the evil is a disease or an illness than quietly grows within us and suddenly debilitates us from out of nowhere. People discover how a health issue can completely change your life – sometimes for the better in the long run but it is never easy at the time.**

**Sometimes the evil is just the circumstances of life, like facing the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the end of an era. There is no one specifically to blame – whatever it is just happened, but it is no less painful. Sometimes it is even more difficult when we have no one to single out as the cause of the evil.**

**Elie Wiesel, in his book "Night," speaks of dealing with evil in the world as he faced the death of his family and his own torture in the Nazi Concentration Camps. He decided that no god could allow such horrible things to happen and so, in the end, there was no god. While his physical**

**body survived the holocaust, his faith was consumed in the flames of the ovens of Auschwitz. That can happen. Sometimes the evil that goes on around us in the wheat field seems unlimited and we wonder where God is in all this. But Jesus assures us that God is always there and His plan is always bigger than we can see or understand.**

**The hard thing for us to comprehend is that it is rarely about us. Frequently, our comfort and our convenience is not at the center of God's plan. And if it is not about us, but we are suffering, what do we pray for? St. Paul talks about the Holy Spirit interceding for us with groans that words cannot express. We look at the fields around us, and we see all the weeds and we don't know what God is doing so how do we pray? Sure, there is the obvious prayer – "Oh Lord, get rid of these weeds!" But that is not the best prayer because the weeds might be helpful in the big picture. That's where the Holy Spirit steps in and prays for what we really need. Those weeds can be used. God can take the evil and use it to strengthen us, grow us, toughen us up, build our faith – and He prepares us for works which we had not even considered. Sadly, Elie Wiesel was Jewish and did not believe in Jesus. He did not believe that Christ had already prepared a place for him in paradise. He thought that life in this world was supposed to be under the protection of God who he believed had chosen the Jews as his special people. That's why Tevye, in "Fiddler on the Roof," is always arguing with God. All the problems in life do not**

**make sense if he is supposed to be protecting us from the weeds. But that is not what he promises. He promises that the weeds will be among us: mean people, gossips, liars, violence, cancer, diabetes, poverty, hunger, brokenness. But he also promises that he will walk with us through these weed-infested fields, and he will use the weeds to help us grow and overcome.**

**The African Americans of the 18th and 19th centuries understood this. They too suffered like the Jews of the 20th century suffered, but out of that suffering came amazing confessions of faith in what we have called the Negro Spiritual. Hymns like, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "There is a Balm in Gilead," and "Go Tell It on the Mountain," express their faith that though they suffer for a while, they knew that the Holy Spirit was interceding for them and they would be delivered, either in this life or in the life to come. They would overcome.**

**But many of the people in the 1930's, 40's and 50's who linked arms in little churches all over this nation and sang "We Shall Overcome," died and went to paradise before anything was overcome. But it was not about them. It was about God and what He was doing. While in Iowa a few years ago for a servant event, I was told this story by one of the other servants. We were looking at the devastation with which we were dealing after horrendous floods – 4,000 homes completely destroyed by**

**the Cedar and Iowa rivers. 200 businesses demolished. Now block after block of boarded up, rotting homes grew mold instead of families. He told me about his uncle who, in 2007, lost his home and everything in it to a fire on Christmas Eve. He went to visit his uncle and found this normally happy and encouraging man to have nothing good to say. He encouraged his uncle, telling him that God would bring good out of this. God would walk with him through this evil and God would bring good out of it.**

**In April of 2008, his uncle's home, on the highest ground in the area and completely covered by insurance, was rebuilt twice as big and far better than the previous home. Better yet, it was unscathed by the floods that June because it was on high ground. When the floods came, the uncle was able to house four families in his large new home for months while those families, who were not insured against flood, found new places to live. His uncle had seen the fire as devastation sent upon him for no good reason. He was a God-fearing, mostly righteous man. Why had God let him down? But the fire had not been about him. The fire had been preparation for serving others during the flood that was to come. The fire had been God's way of using evil to bring about blessing not just for the man but for four other families.**

**There are weeds in the wheat field and we cannot do anything about that. But God promises three things. First, he will take care of all the weeds, that is all the evil, when Jesus returns. The weeds will be**

**removed and locked up in eternal death and we will be delivered to eternal life. Second, until that day, He walks with us and promises to turn all things for our good. Sometimes we will get to see that happen and sometimes we will be in paradise long before it does but it will all be for the good of God's children. And third, it is not about us. We are called to do good and glorify God, sometimes we benefit from the good that was done generations before us and sometimes we lay the foundation for good that will come generations from now but in the end, it is all about God and never about us, so we can stop worrying about evil. So what if there is evil all around us? Eventually it will all be good and the groans of the Holy Spirit ensure that whatever we need, is already being requested.**