

The Bethel Pulpit

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BETHEL

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at www.bethel-madison.org

312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

Text: Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Title: Weeds n' Wheat

Grace and peace to you from Jesus, our risen Lord and Savior.

Raise your hand if you are or were a farmer...or are a child of a farmer...

Did you ever 'walk beans'? Or is 'walking beans' just a Minnesota thing? We raised our 5 sons on a farm in south-central Minnesota in the 70's, and in those years, it was a common summer job to 'walk beans'. For those of you who don't know what that means, it's quite simple: once the soy beans have grown tall enough that it would be dangerous to cultivate them mechanically, the local farmers would hire the teen-agers of the area to 'walk the beans'...and pull out, by hand, all the weeds between the plants and between the rows. No responsible farmer that I ever knew would follow Jesus' advice in this parable:

when the weeds come, just let them grow alongside the beans, until the harvest.

Cockleburrs, lamb's quarter, waterweed, velvet leaf...you name it...the weeds have to be pulled, so that the beans can have maximum water and nutrition for their growth.

So, just maybe, the Bible should not serve as the manual for Wisest Agricultural Practices. Maybe it's good for us to remember that the Bible is a STORY book, that relates common plants, like weeds and wheat, to life practices.

Maybe then we can hear these stories, gleaning the wisdom that Jesus offers us. Jesus says: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared..." "May be compared" are important words. Jesus does not say: "The kingdom of heaven is just like a wheat field." In other words, 'one way to think about the kingdom of heaven' is to think about a field of grain. You already know what that is like: good wheat plants grow right alongside weeds.

So the question is: what should we do about the weeds? Should we be careful of our definition of 'weed'? What IS a weed? Something that grows where it doesn't belong? Back in my 'bean-walking' days, we were taught to pull anything and everything that was NOT a soy bean. Yes, velvet leaf and lamb's quarter, to be sure, but also we pulled corn, treating good corn plants like weeds: OUT!

I think I'm not the only gardener who knows that sometimes it's really hard to tell the weeds from the good plants. So, here, Jesus is reminding us that it's sometimes easy to confuse weeds with the good wheat. And Jesus says: "Hey there! be careful....careful with your judgment of what is a weed and what is a fruitful plant!" That goes hand in hand with his warning that sometimes, when we try to pull out the weeds, the good plants are also uprooted.

Lots to think about here, in this parable. More than one way to read these warnings. Is Jesus talking about good and bad people? Or is Jesus talking about the good and the bad that lives inside each one of us? Yes! that is what Jesus is talking about: both situations inside of one story.

Whichever way you choose to read this story, whether we think the story is about good and evil people or we think this is about the good and evil forces within each one of us, we do well to be mindful and cautious in at least two ways:

1. Don't be in a rush to make the distinction: be careful! Don't act too quickly! You could uproot the good by pulling all the weeds.
2. More importantly: the decision is not yours...nor mine...to make. Clearly, Jesus says that "the Son of Man will send his angels to collect 'all causes of sin'"...thankfully, it's Jesus's job...neither yours nor mine... to make the discernment.

Who is this farmer in God's kingdom of heaven? More than enough mystery in this one little parable to give us reason to ponder the merciful leniency of this God who holds the whole world...the entire wheat field of creation...in wise and loving hands. Wait and see. Let God be God.