



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for January 23, 2022
"Fruitfulness: Good Seed"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Matthew 13:36-43

How Does Your Garden Grow?

We ended last week asking ourselves the question, "*How Does Your Garden Grow?*" Everyone who has had a garden knows that you must tend a garden for it to be really fruitful. Gardens take work. Do I hear an amen?

Centenary Church in Lexington where I pastored before coming to Saint John had a parcel of land out Athens-Boonesboro Road near I-75. One spring I floated the idea of starting a community garden out there. I had a lot of takers. We had a farmer till about twenty plots and let everyone interested have at it.

The vegetables came up like crazy, but so did the weeds. Those who worked at keeping the weeds at bay had bumper crops. Those who didn't, well their crop wasn't nearly as strong. The Griebs were included in that number. You have to tend your garden if you want a fruitful crop.

One interesting note about the community garden, we had less takers the next spring. I guess it was just too much work.

Seed Instead of Soil

Last week we talked a good deal about soil. In fact, we talked about four soils: the four soils that Jesus talked about in his *Parable of the Soils*.

We talked about the soil that was hardened like that of a path. We likened that soil to a **hardened** heart.

We talked about rocky soil, where seed would sprout, but was prevented from taking root because of rock just below the surface. We likened this type of soil to a **shallow** heart.

We also talked about the soil where seed grew but was eventually choked out by weeds and thorns. We likened this soil to a **strangled** heart.

Finally, we talked about fertile soil, where fruitfulness abounded. We likened this soil to a **surrendered** heart.

This morning our focus is not so much on soil, but on seed. Our attention turns to Jesus' great *Parable of the Weeds* from Matthew 13:24ff. Jesus shares that the Kingdom of Heaven is like the man who sowed good seed in his field, only to have someone come in behind him, while he slept, and sow bad seed among the good. The wheat sprouted, but so did the weeds.

The man figured out what had happened. He knew his efforts had been sabotaged. When asked by his servants what he wanted them to do, he told them to wait. *"We'll take care of it when we harvest,"* he said. *"We'll separate the weeds from wheat at that time."*

As Jesus did with the *Parable of the Soils*, he offers an explanation to the *Parable of the Weeds*. That explanation becomes the focus of our attention today. Let's hear then Christ's explanation to the *Parable of the Weeds* as found in Matthew 13:36-43.

Matthew 13:36-43

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for 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.

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

The Fruit of the Spirit

As we said just a second ago our focus today is more so on seed and not so much on soil, recognizing that you need both to grow what's planted. For us, we not only need to be concerned about the condition of our hearts, but the sort of seed we are allowing to be planted in them, and how that affects the way we live our lives.

Paul challenges us when he writes in Galatians 6:7-8, *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*

Paul is speaking about fruitfulness here. Essentially, he strikes a correlation between the seed we sow and the fruit we bear. Paul gets down to it just earlier in Galatians when he talks about the fruit of the Spirit. He contrasts that fruit with a list of things that manifest themselves in our lives when we are prone to give into our sinful nature.

In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul writes, *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."*

"I warn you," says Paul, *"that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God."*

Paul immediately puts us to thinking about more positive things in the next two verses. He talks about the fruit that is born when we live by the Spirit. *"But the fruit of the Spirit,"* he says, *"is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* (Galatians 5:22-23)

If you are looking for a description of what it means to live a fruitful life, there you have it. Good seed leads to good fruit.

The Final Judgement

Admittedly, the *Parable of the Weeds* is a tough one. It is not easily deciphered. Thankfully, Jesus offers an explanation. He sees the parable as pointing to the Final Judgement. He figures that ultimately God will do the weeding. The harvest at the end of time will include both good and bad. The good will shine and the bad will be cast away.

That's a tough word that's not easy to hear.

I read Christ's explanation of the *Parable of the Weeds* to say that the Final Judgement is God's business, and we need to leave it to him.

Judge Not

At another level, I think Jesus, by having the servants wait to pull up the weeds, talks about another sort of judgement. I'm talking about the sort of judgement where one person judges another. That sort of judgement is particularly keen when it comes to the religious judging those who aren't so religious. Borrowing from our parable for today, the wheat is quick to call out the weeds.

Judging others is rampant these days. It goes on all the time. We just can't help it, and we wonder where that comes from. Judging others is a deceptive way of building ourselves up at the expense of someone else. It's been that way for us since third grade.

Jesus is quick to call us out on that. "*Judge not, lest you be judged,*" he says in Matthew 7:1.

"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?'

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:3-5)

It's interesting that in the *Parable of the Weeds* the weed Jesus referred to probably a plant called "*bearded darnel*." The interesting thing about "*bearded darnel*" is that when it first comes up it looks exactly like wheat. It is hard, if not impossible, to distinguish the wheat from the weed.

The other thing about "*bearded darnel*" is that its roots get intertwined with the wheat, and if you try to pull it up the wheat will come up as well. That's why Jesus in the *Parable of the Weeds* has the farmer telling his servant to wait to pull up the weeds.

We'd do well to wait when it comes to judging others. After all, judging is God's business anyway. It is an exercise in futility to be concerned about the failings of others and not consider your own.

Tending the Weeds of Our Own Lives

I like the story told of the fellow and his wife who went to a full-service gas station to get a fill up. The guy also wanted to get his windshield washed.

The attendant did it once, but not to the satisfaction of the man. *“Do it again,”* he said. The attendant washed it again and still it wasn’t enough. The attendant tied a third time, and it still wasn’t enough.

It was then that the man’s wife chimed in and asked her husband to look at his glasses. They were as dirty as could be.

Our own failings skew how we see others. As Jesus encourages us, we’d do well to consider the failings in our own lives before considering the failings of others. Borrowing from our parable for today, we do well to tend to the weeds in our own garden.

I have heard it said, *“If the grass looks greener on the other side, it might be that your neighbor is taking better care of their lawn.”*

As we know from experience, weeds have a way of sprouting up all over the place if left unattended. Consider the weeds and thorns mentioned last week in relation to the soil of a *“strangled heart.”* The *“worries and cares of this life,”* coupled with the *“deceitfulness of wealth”* have a way our choking out God’s good work in our lives.

It’s interesting that the bad seed in the *Parable of the Weeds* was planted while the farmer slept. The weeds that so often affect our spiritual lives often take root out of neglect. We fail to maintain a strong relationship with the Lord.

- We let our Bible reading slip.
- We rush through our prayers.
- We fail to worship regularly.
- We turn our backs on opportunities to serve.

We nurture seeds planted by the world at the expense of nurturing those seeds planted by God. Weeding out the things of the world is not easy. It takes discipline and a commitment to God, above all else.

Let’s face it, there is good and bad in each of us. Read Romans 7 if you want to know more.

“The very things I know not to do I do, and the very things I know to do I don’t.” Paul’s struggle is our struggle.

Our struggle is a lot like the struggle highlighted in the *Parable of the Weeds*. How do we get rid of the bad without destroying the good? I contend it is best done with God’s help.

So, What’s It Going to Be for You?

So, what’s it going to be for you? Will yours be a field full of weeds or a field full of wheat? The answer comes as you let God do his thing in our life.

God bless us all.