Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, July 19, 2026
"In the Weeds"

Young at Heart Message

Years ago, shortly after my return to church after a long hiatus, I attended a worship service at a church back home in Wisconsin.

This was a church I had never been to before, but I decided to attend because someone I knew had suggested it.

Things went fine until the pastor of the church started to preach. I don't know what passage he was preaching on specifically, but he began to talk about his father.

He shared that his late father was most certainly in hell.

He began to give reasons for it, and while I can't remember exactly what those reasons were, some of the things he listed were common, everyday things that many people do.

He didn't live the healthiest lifestyle, he made some poor decisions in his life, and he didn't expressly accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

This sermon made me incredibly uncomfortable, and it took me a long time to parse out why.

Part of the problem was that every person in that room most likely committed some of the same "egregious" sins that he claimed that his father had committed.

So this pastor stood up in front of a congregation and essentially called them all sinners and implied that they were going to hell.

It certainly didn't leave a great feeling in my heart, and I didn't feel like I received Good News that day, that's for sure.

It also didn't sound like the Jesus I knew.

This is similar to another story I came across as I was preparing for today's sermon, and I'd like to share that story with you as well.

The author, David Lower, shared about his time spent as a chaplain in a hospital.

While he was on duty, he received a call to a dying man's bedside.

When he walked into the room where a lovely old man was taking his final breaths, the man's eldest son introduced himself.

The son introduced his dying dad to the chaplain and then said, "I'm pleased to report that Dad's been saved for 27 years now, thank God, so there's nothing to worry about here."

He continued, "The reason I sent for you is because you may want to pay a visit next door. That poor man - he's…"

His voice dropped to a whisper and said:

"...unsaved. Unchurched. You know what I mean?"

David goes on to say the following:

"I did learn that his dad's neighbor was at peace, surrounded by loved ones after a laudable life of service to others. What I'll never forget is the revealing picture I caught as I walked away. The two rooms shared a doorway, with a thin partition between. I stood in the doorway and saw two families, probably with very different worldviews, surrounding their departing loved ones in pure expressions of love. The beauty on either side of the wall was similarly striking and holy, and it was hard to imagine God feeling anything but glorified by it all."

In other words, this man's experience with these two families was nothing but love for a dying family member.

It is a stark reminder that there are many different ways that God's saving work can be made manifest in people's lives, and we may not be in a position to determine that ourselves, or at first glance.

It begs the question about whether or not we ever need to be in a position where we are responsible for judging people's faith, or their mistakes.

And this is where I want to begin talking about our Gospel passage from Matthew today.

The Message

Just like last week, we receive a parable from Jesus followed by an explanation. This time though, the explanation claims that it was Jesus who made it.

However, Jesus does not typically do this work of explaining parables like this, so it is more likely that Matthew added these explanations later to make things

easier for people to understand, or perhaps to place his own interpretation on the parable.

But the reason Jesus tends to speak using parables is because it's up to each of us to discern the meaning for ourselves.

So of course, pastors get to do the work of trying to explain what the parables *might* mean in today's context, but our explanations are our own interpretations too.

All of that said, I want to think about this parable in terms of the two stories I just shared with you.

In both of the stories I shared, one person is taking it upon themselves to judge what others do and, in particular, to try to determine who is saved and who is not, OR, who is faithful and who is not.

I don't know about all of you, but that is *not* a job I would ever want. Thank God that a pastor's job isn't to make that judgement call!

The parable of the weeds and the wheat can be interpreted to portray what appear to be "insiders" and "outsiders" of heaven.

But when the land owner is asked whether or not the servants should pull the weeds, he responds by suggesting that instead, they allow the weeds to grow along with the wheat until the harvest, at which time they can be separated.

The two story lines playing out in a single field portray the coexistence of good and evil, with their outgrowths growing side by side, intertwining.

If the servants try to gather the weeds, they might struggle to tell the difference between plants. They might get rid of the weeds and uproot the good growth, too.

So the gathering and separating will not be done until the harvest time, when angels will reap and gather the good wheat into the barn and discard the rest for burning.

Followers of Jesus - presumably characterized as the servants in the fields - are encouraged to be patient and trustful that good growth is still occurring and will prevail, even when the weeds seem rampant.

It is not their job to separate good from evil because in the end, the doers of evil will be cast out.

Then, all that will remain is the good, shining like the sun.

The lessons Jesus is trying to communicate about God's kingdom can be seen throughout history.

And, indeed, they can be seen in this moment, too.

We can all see weeds. That is essentially what the pastor at the church I attended was saying – he could see the weeds in the field and he wanted to pick out the weeds and uproot them himself.

Likewise, the son of the dying man in the hospital saw his neighbour as a "weed," to use this same metaphor. He couldn't see the beauty in the man's life because of his determination about his faith (or lack thereof).

We can all see weeds – or what we *think* are weeds.

But, maybe we shouldn't make it our business to try to separate the weeds from the wheat.

As servants of Jesus, we can help nurture, feed, and cultivate the good growth that's been planted by sharing the Good News and doing our best to love one another, heal one another, and seek the lost like Jesus.

There's more than enough for us to do and worry about in this lifetime that we can allow God to do the picking and separating when it comes to people.

Thank God we aren't called to do that work. We are simply asked to love one another.

We are asked to look out at that field and appreciate the wheat alongside the weeds, knowing that we don't need to worry about separating it all because that is ultimately God's job.

It's our job to nourish and help both flourish as best we can, and to remember that everything and everyone are intertwined.

And, in the end, we are simply called to love and be loved. Amen.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we sometimes forget that even weeds can be beautiful. When we find ourselves wanting to parse out the weeds from the wheat, help us to remember that it is your work to do that, not ours. Guide us instead toward appreciating the weeds and the wheat being intertwined together, and help us to do as you call us to do, which is to love both. In your holy and gracious name, we pray. Amen.

Resource*: The Christian Century*, In the Lectionary, David Bower, Sunday July 20, 2014