

“Growing Next to Each Other”

July 19, 2026

First Christian Church

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

We know the titles many of our Bibles put above the different stories were not written by the original authors any more than the chapter and verse numbers. Those were all added later by Bible publishers to make the Bible more readable and accessible. And I have no problem with them. Personally, I appreciate them. Like the title my Bible puts above this morning's Scripture lesson is "The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat". I find that very descriptive and helpful. To begin with, it reminds us this is a parable. Remember a parable is not a factual story that happened to Jesus or anyone around Him. A parable is a very earthy, relatable story put alongside a significant spiritual truth in order to give insight into that spiritual truth. Some like to call parables "earthly stories with a heavenly meaning." Parables are intended to make you think.

Today's parable takes on the question of why there is so much evil in the world? Why didn't God just make the world good to begin with, or at least destroy all the evil along the way? Through the parable and its explanation, first of all, Jesus says God did create it good. God planted good seed when calling creation into being. In the creation story from Genesis 1, 5 of the 6 days God actively works on creation end with the words "it was good" or "it was very good". For some reason on day 2, when God created the dome that made a living space on earth – what we call the sky or atmosphere – God did not look back on that day and call it good. I don't know why. But it was created good.

But then something happened to the good seed God planted. Verse 25 says, "While everybody was asleep an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away." When the disciples asked Jesus about it, He said, "the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil." And when the angels asked God what they should do about it, God said, "Let both of them grow together" "for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them." I appreciate that. I appreciate God's concern for the wheat which is defined as "the children of the kingdom". God does not want to risk the children. Losing a child of the kingdom is too high a price to pay for getting rid of the weeds. It just isn't worth it. Wait until harvest and sort them out then. Just don't risk hurting the children. I appreciate this glimpse into God's heart.

But again, a parable is supposed to make us think. As many of you know, I tend to preach from something called the lectionary which assigns: an Old Testament reading, a reading from the Psalms, a reading about Jesus from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John; and an epistle reading from one the letters of the New Testament. Each Sunday I choose one of these readings to preach

from. But this week they messed with me. Just when I settled in with the “The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat” and how God lets the weeds and the wheat grow together out of care for the wheat and not wanting to risk uprooting it, I read the Psalm. Psalm 86 is attributed to David and our Psalm starts like you would expect a song to start – with affirmation and praise. Starting in verse 12,

“I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.
For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.”

But then it takes a turn.

“O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set You before them.
But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and
faithfulness.

Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give Your strength to Your servant;
save the child of Your maidservant.

Show me a sign of Your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.”

These weeds that God is letting grow along with the wheat are threatening the wheat. The “insolent” and the “ruffians” are competing for the same resources as God’s chosen. The weeds are choking out the good seed. This is one of God’s faithful who is crying out for God to do things differently. Don’t let the weeds and wheat grow alongside each other and wait for the harvest. The weeds are winning. Pull the weeds now! That sounds like a valid request. God, we need Your help now. It doesn’t look like we are going to make it to harvest for You to sort them out. We need help now.

So should God pull the weeds and risk uprooting some of the wheat, or let the weeds and wheat grow together and risk some of wheat being choked out?

It is a little embarrassing for me to admit this, but I still enjoy watching tv shows from the old days including westerns and shows from the 70’s. As a matter of fact, since our Alaska cruise, we have been watching old episodes of “The Love Boat”. In some ways the shows are absolutely terrible – most obviously in their depiction of women – but they are just simpler and more relaxing than current TV. Everything back then was two dimensional. Each character is either good or bad. No nuance. No broken heroes or heroic villains. No blurred lines. Just good guys verses bad guys and the good guys always win. But is that real? Are people either all good

or all bad? Are they either children of the kingdom or children of the evil one? I am not going to speak for you, but I know I have both inside me. In certain times and certain topics, I am a confident and bold member of God's kingdom. In other times and other topics, I hear and listen to the voice of the evil one, the selfish one, the conniving one, the lazy one. There is a tough line between being practical and being greedy. Practicing self-care and just being selfish? If I were in a western, I would probably have to wear a black and white striped hat. It is like the devil sowed weeds in me after God sowed good seed. The field Jesus talks about is not just the world. It is me, as an individual. David's enemies are not just outside. There are weeds growing from within.

How does that change the discussion about the amount of evil in the world? Does it become a mathematical equation? If a person is 40% bad and 60% good, then they get to stay and grow with the wheat, but if a person is 60% bad and only 40% good then they should be plucked? What should the percentages be? How does God's forgiveness or whether we ask for forgiveness fit into the equation? Can God pluck part of us and only leave 60% of a person? Or is that the damaged roots Jesus is warning about that comes when pulling the weeds?

And then I read the epistle reading from the lectionary. Romans 8, verses 12-14 then 22 and 23, "So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God... We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." Paul uses the terms flesh and spirit to proclaim what is true out there is true in here. Neither the world nor our souls are two-dimensional characters filled with either all good seed or all bad weeds. Old westerns and sit-coms are not real and they never were. Planted in us and all around us are both wheat and weeds, and the competition between the two for resources and life itself is real, and God cannot remove part of us without doing incredible damage to the rest of us.

But the good news of Romans is that the struggle of the disciples who asked Jesus to explain the parable because the weeds and the wheat growing together confused them, the pain of David who prayed for God to both strengthen him and put his enemies to shame, the inner turmoil between the flesh and spirit both Paul and the Romans experienced; Romans 8:12 calls these labor pains. Real pain, sometimes overwhelming pain, but pain that is not in vain. It is pain that leads to a new life. For those who struggle with the confusion, those who endure the pain of others seeming to win at the start, and those who continue to listen to God's voice in the midst of the other very real voices of evil inside them; they will be known as the children of God and will be born into new life in heaven. If you live for this world alone, you will die in this world alone, and that is it. If you live for the God beyond this world, you die in the God beyond

this world, into a world where the weeds out there and the weeds in here have been burned away and life is purely good.

But until that day comes – until the harvest when the wheat is brought home and the weeds are burned with unquenchable fire – until then, follow the advice of the old Cherokee who shared with his grandson. “A fight is going on inside me.” “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

Whether you resonate with two wolves, flesh and spirit, or weeds and wheat; thank you for being here to feed the good that is from God. Feed the spirit and starve the flesh. Continue following God in your life and don't be overly consumed with the “insolent” and the “ruffians”. Dig your roots deep into God's good soil. There you will find life, now and forever, even while living among the weeds.

Mike Van Heyningen