

Matthew 13:24-30  
July 23, 2017

“Against All Odds, Wheat Still Grows”

Rev. William Utke  
Emanuel UCC, HC

In the parable today, Jesus tells about a garden; a plot where good seeds of wheat are planted but a mischievous gardener comes along and plants weeds. Now the wheat and weeds are growing side by side.

We don't need a parable to tell us wheat and weeds are growing side by side in this world. We are constantly inundated by the ugliness which seems to be trying to choke all of God's goodness and beauty.

Many preachers read this parable and assume people sitting in the pew want to understand how and why an all-powerful, all-loving God allows evil to exist? A sermon like that can get dreary and depressing pretty quickly. This morning I want to invite us into this parable with fresh eyes.

In 1997 British Rock group Chumbawamba released the song “tubthumping.” More popularly known by the opening lyrics to the catchy refrain, “I Get Knocked Down.” With a vibrant and driving beat in the background the refrain sings, “I get knocked down, but I get up again, you're never gonna keep me down.” The song rang out with a hopeful message for many: Children created dances to the song, British Politician Jeremy Corbyn used the lyrics in a political speech, Boxer Luke Campbell used the song for inspiration in his matches. The song grew in people and places where hope, courage and strength were desperately needed.

Preaching is about sharing the good news of God's love. And the good news in this parable is not in the weeds. The good news is in the wheat, the good seed. Against all odds Wheat is still growing in God's field!! It hasn't been choked, or overtaken. Good seed is defying all odds and enduring under strenuous conditions where its nourishment is limited. Good seed is living in spite of every attempt by the weeds to take it down. Jesus affirms the eternal will of God's good seed when he tells the farm worker to allow the wheat and weeds to grow together waiting for the harvester to take care of this at harvest time.

Some Bible experts suggest that the weed Jesus is referring to in this parable is the bearded darnel. The roots of this weed surround the roots of the good plants sucking up nutrients and scarce water, making it impossible to remove the weed without uprooting the good plant.

Above the ground, these experts say Bearded Darnel looks almost exactly like wheat until the plant bears a seed that if ingested, can cause hallucinations and even death.

Considering the reality of weeds in our world, let me share a personal story about the good seeds of healing and love.

When I was 5 years old, my bike was stolen. I had run into the house to get a drink, returned outside just a minute later, and it was gone. I ran worried into the house, and after my Mom realized what had happened, I became upset. She hugged and reassured me. She took time to listen, to understand the loss and vulnerability I felt. She didn't scold me for leaving my bike unlocked for a few minutes even though I knew better. She just loved me.

When Dad came home we told him the story. He hugged me and shared a story about a time he felt bad when something similar happened to him as a child. He didn't rush to fix the situation, he just loved me. My pain didn't go away immediately but each experience of being loved, eased it some.

When my older brother heard what had happened he didn't tease me as I expected, he didn't gloat that he still had his bike, he hugged me and said he was sorry it happened. As I shared my story with more relatives and friends each of them loved me, and listened, and the pain eased more and more.

My family and friends offered seeds of love. I still had to allow them to grow and heal, but every step of the way I was offered an abundance of good seed. The pain and fear I experienced was never buried, or ignored, or belittled, or downplayed. I was thoroughly drenched in the love of God, family and friends and mysteriously.... over time, this took away the gripping pain evil had on me.

The parable assures us evil IS growing. There are weeds of lawlessness and faithlessness, unloveliness and arrogance, untruth and rudeness. There are weeds of violence, destruction and decay.

As God's people the parable calls us to proclaim a brighter today and tomorrow. The parable tells of a harvest day when goodness and beauty will be eternally preserved. The harvest will come in multi-fold. But the parable also promises seeds of hope and love growing strong in the midst of today's struggles and challenges.

That means if you are dealing with sorrow, or pain, or suffering, or hurt, or regret, or low self esteem, or loss of direction... Hope is growing right now. Love is growing right now. Forgiveness just inched a little taller. Joy is blooming right now. Faith is maturing right now. God will not be defeated by some weeds.

As we live in this garden called earth Jesus calls us to be people who raise up stories of hope. Focus on God's beauty. We can open our ears to hear the melodies of God's new song, and open our hearts to experience the promise of God's new day, and open our mouths to proclaim God's power as it unfolds even in the most strenuous of times, here and now.

I am reminded of God's promises every time we sing in church. Let me close sharing the refrain to the Old Hymn, "For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noontide bright, And Christ's Great Kingdom shall come on earth the Kingdom of love of light."

Amen