

“The Garden of Heaven”

Weeds are a big problem at this time of year. Give those seeds some moisture and a little warmth, and they grow like Topsy. Weeds are the bane of the gardener, the farmer, and suburban homeowner. They even pop up in our sidewalks and driveways. A little crack affords them just enough space to grow. If the soil is good enough to grow grass, a flower, or a vegetable, it is also good enough to grow a weed. Weeds are so numerous and varied that my brother, who is an urban arborist, wanted a book called *Weeds of the Northeast*. It is 406 pages long. Now that’s a lot of weeds.

In our vegetable gardens, weeds compete with the tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and everything else for nutrients from the soil, sunlight, and water. They do the same in our flower gardens. I have heard someone say that a weed is just a flower out of place. Well, I have never heard anyone call crabgrass, chickweed, ground ivy, and wiregrass a flower. If we saw them in our church flower arrangements, we would be worried about the Altar Guild.

My grandfather started a nursery business in 1919. His four children grew up in the business, and three of them worked in it their entire lives. My father was one of them. Thus, my brother and I worked in the fields of the nursery hoeing and pulling weeds from an early age. We did not like the work. It was hot, boring, and backbreaking. We got great tans on our backs, and the sun bleached our hair blond. That and a paycheck were the only benefits. Despite my dislike of weeding as a youth, as an adult, if I see a weed I have to pull it up. It is as ingrained as breathing. My father was never satisfied with my hoeing, but I think he would be pleased with my weeding.

Any gardener or farmer who reads today’s Gospel selection from Matthew has to wonder about the landowner’s decision not to pull up the weeds that someone has sown among his crop of wheat. As I noted above, the weeds compete with crops for nutrients and water. A smart farmer wants to give his crops their best chance for producing abundantly. Removing weeds is a prudent thing to do.

However, we must remember that at the beginning of this parable Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...” Whenever Jesus says this, it is a signal that what he is about to say in the parable is going to turn what we normally think about the world upside-down. What is different about this scenario is not just that an enemy sowed weeds among his wheat, but that the weeds are not just any weeds but tares.

Tares are a particular type of weed, bearded darnel, which, in its early growth, looks an awful lot like wheat. This weed is going to be hard to distinguish from wheat when weeding. There is every likelihood that when weeding, wheat will be pulled up by mistake, thus reducing the wheat crop. A prudent wheat farmer allows them to grow together until the wheat and tares begin to mature and become easier to distinguish.

However, this farmer wants to wait until harvest time. If the farmer doesn’t pull up the weeds earlier, the crops will not be nearly as healthy or prolific. A smart farmer wants the weeds out of the way. Pulling the weeds at harvest will not benefit the wheat. The damage will be done.

But as is so often the case in Jesus’ parables, he turns the practical world on its head in order to show us a new way, the Kingdom of Heaven way. The Kingdom of Heaven defies what we think is reasonable, and sure enough this story is outside of human reason. A farmer confronted with weeds among the wheat would rather let them grow together than chance having any wheat pulled up. Pulling up a few good plants is a by-product of our weeding, but not so in the Kingdom of Heaven. The wheat, which can be compared to you and me, cannot be sacrificed; it is too precious. Collateral damage which we find acceptable so many times in our world is not acceptable in the world to come. So, the weeds and the wheat are allowed to grow together until harvest time.

In the Kingdom of Heaven, the Son of Man is also willing to let the weeds, sown by the enemy, grow up alongside the wheat, because there is a chance, a very marvelous chance, that the weeds might find themselves turned into wheat. It does not seem reasonable in our world, but in the world to come tares and wheat

may bring forth a field full of righteous wheat. For those of us who are a little weedy, that is Good News.

I would bet that everyone here has felt like a weed, acted like a weed, or been a weed at some time or another. Even if we were sown as wheat, we have acted like weeds by denying love to others, withholding care from others, or by being mean or foolish. We have been one of a million things that would mark us as weeds that ought to be pulled up and bound together with other weeds and thrown into the fire. But Jesus is not going to give up on us. We have the potential to be the best wheat and to live into the full potential that God wants for us.

St. Augustine, who was rather weedy himself, wrote, “I tell you of a truth, my Beloved, even in these high seats there is both wheat and tares, and among the laity there is wheat, and tares. Let the good tolerate the bad; let the bad change themselves, and imitate the good. Let us all, if it may be so, attain to God; let us all through His mercy escape the evil of this world.”¹

The God who created us, knows us, and loves us, is not going to give up on us because we are weedy. God who trusted in and worked with very weedy people like Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Rahab, David, Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Paul is not giving up on you or me. God’s harvest of love cannot be upended by the tricks of the enemy or the weediness of our souls. God’s love is so overwhelming that no matter how hard we try to resist, God’s love will prevail.

Because God is God, and because when all is said and done God’s love is irresistible, the harvest will be plentiful. And the weeds, well, if everything else is turned on its head as it has been in this parable, then in the Kingdom of Heaven even the weeds will become precious wheat. And that, my brothers and sisters, is good news for everyone.

¹ Retrieved from Wikipedia article on Parable of the Tares, July 18, 2026