

Sunday Sermon July 19, 2026

Weeds and wheat. Weeds and wheat. Weeds and wheat in today's Gospel. Brings to mind a few stories...

One sunny spring day about 10 years ago when we lived up in Duluth, the snow had finally melted and the grass was turning green. It was in June, I think... I was out in the yard looking around, and my neighbor was working in one of his many flower beds.

"These darn dandelions" I said. "All over the yard. I've gotta get busy and dig them out."

And my neighbor said: "Oh, no, I love the dandelions! The first flower of spring. The bees need them because they wake up hungry after a long winter's sleep, and it's the only flower in bloom. Don't you remember gathering up a handful and giving them to your mother? And blowing on them when they had turned to seed? I think I'm going to make some dandelion wine this year. I love the dandelions."

Weeds and wheat.

Similarly, I have a neighbor here on Sanibel who loves working in her yard. She's out there almost every day, gradually replanting with all native species. The other day I was chatting with her and noticing some of her newest plantings. I commented that she had a couple of periwinkles peeking through, with their lovely purple flowers.

She looked at me with sadness. "Did you hear about the periwinkles? Their invasive."

What? Can't be. Our church is on Periwinkle Way, down the street from Periwinkle Park! There's a Periwinkle Place right over there. They're lovely green and purple, and they seem to just show up like a gift from God!

So I consulted with Evelyn, my local plant expert, and she explained that while they are technically considered invasive, they can be classified as “Florida Friendly.”

Thank goodness – our lovely Periwinkles have been rescued from the judgement of some “expert.”

Weeds and wheat.

A while back a colleague of mine, who serves a church in California, was telling me about an inquirers group that had met at the church. A group of new people, sitting in a circle, introducing themselves and talking about why they had started coming to All Saints.

Some talked about having been away from church for a long time after being hurt in some way. One couple talked about a more recent bad experience where they were not accepted. One young guy was honest enough to say he was there because his girlfriend made him come.

And then they came to an older man who had just been sitting quietly, sipping his coffee from a Styrofoam cup. “I’m Ray” he said “and I just got out of prison. People from this church came and visited me every month. My own family didn’t visit, but people from this church came. I’m just here to find out what that’s all about.”

Weeds and wheat.

Today’s parable about weeds and wheat is a judgement parable. Matthew’s big on judgement parables, and probably for good reason. It’s so easy to judge: skin color, accent, education, where you live, what you have and don’t have, appearance, political affiliation, choices you’ve made – the list is endless. Endless judgment: weed/wheat, weed/wheat, weed/wheat

We might be tempted to look around this very church and judge who’s wheat and who’s a weed.

But Jesus makes it clear, through this parable, that we are to leave the judging up to God. Judgement is God’s business, meaning it’s not our business.

Jesus makes this clear over and over.

There's a powerful story in the Gospel in John where a big crowd has gathered to throw rocks at a woman they judged to be a weed. And Jesus says "those of you without sin can cast a stone." They all dropped their rocks, as we would have to drop our rock, right? Jesus extended the table to tax collectors and "sinners" of all sorts over and over.

We are not the sower in the parable. We are not the judge. I don't even think we're the seeds. We are the helpful servants.

Helpful servants – inclined toward wanting to pull up the weeds: dandelions, periwinkles, convicts – but obedient to the owner of the fields. Keeping our hands off and letting the owner take care of things. Letting God be the judge.

We want to sift, sort, separate. Using our shovels and machetes to thin, chop down, pull up into some smaller and purer homogeneous world. The current divisions in our country and our world are a testimony to that – If we disagree, you're bad! You're a weed!

But that is not the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is diversity in all its marvelous beauty. It is inclusion and acceptance. Dandelions and tulips, Periwinkles and Purple Passion Flowers, felons and saints. Wheat and weeds. Our job is to love. Not to judge. We leave that up to God.

Our friends Barbara Brown Taylor has a wonderful, imaginative depiction of the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat. I'll leave you with this:

"One afternoon in the middle of the growing season, a bunch of farm hands decided to surprise their boss and weed his favorite wheat field. No sooner had they begun to work, however, than they began to argue...about which of the wheat-looking things were weeds. Did the Queen Anne's lace, for example, pose a real threat to the wheat, or could it stay for decoration? And the blackberries? After all, they were weeds. But they would be ripe in a week or two. And the honeysuckle...it seemed a shame to pull up anything that smelled so sweet.

About the time they had gotten around to debating the purple asters, the boss showed up and ordered them out of his field. Dejected, they did as they were told. Back at the barn, he took their machetes away from them, poured them some lemonade, and made them sit down where they could watch the way the light moved across the field.

At first, all they could see were the weeds and what a messy field it was...and what a discredit to their profession. But as the summer wore on, they marveled at the profusion of growth. Tall wheat surrounded by tall goldenrod, accented by a mixture of ragweed and brown-eyed Susans. Even the poison ivy flourished beside the Cherokee roses. It was a mess. But a glorious mess. And when it had all bloomed and ripened, the reapers came.

Carefully...gently...expertly...they gather the wheat and made the rest into bricks for the oven where the bread was baked. And the fire the weeds made was excellent. And the flour the wheat made was excellent. And when the owner called them together...farm hands, reapers, along with all the neighbors...and broke bread with them (bread that was the final distillation of that messy, gorgeous, mixed up field), they all agreed that it was like no bread they had ever tasted before. And that it was very, very good.”

Amen