

July 5, 2026

Going to Seed series

with Rev. Lynda Ellis

Today we find ourselves with another teaching of Jesus – weeds & wheat - only found in Matthew's gospel.....

And its' an odd one! I somehow managed to avoid this teaching for a long time..... maybe 35 or more years.

It seems like whenever this reading in Matthew came up in the lectionary, I always chose the story in the Hebrew scriptures of Jacob and his ladder.

But Leah has a knack for picking passages that I've managed to avoid!

And the reading today is about weeds & wheat.

As Leah pointed out last week, Jesus had a subversive way in his teaching to use images that the crowds would understand.

He didn't talk about Roman empire or rulers.....

because Jesus' audience was largely an agrarian society it was perfectly natural for him to use images of seeds and wheat, lambs & pigs, chickens & barns.....

On page after page of the Gospels, Jesus and his disciples found themselves on the road in Galilee, Judea and Samaria.

Jesus seized the opportunity for change created by unrest in Galilee.....

.....By the injustices of the Roman occupation, and by corruption among the religious elite

He framed his message through a powerful central image – the kingdom of God -

A unique art form – the parables – and

Through powerful slogans - repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.....love your enemies.....deny yourself.....take up your cross and follow me....

He developed a protest and messaging strategy that included public teach-ins, demonstrations, guerrilla theater and advanced action-reflection leadership training

His mobilizing structures included the three, the twelve, the seventy and special two-by-two initiatives

He taught his disciples to build allies among “people of peace” and to be willing to let people walk away if they were not ready for the demands of the movement.

His movement culture also emphasized the value of contemplative solitude and withdrawal to nourish the inner life and sustain the struggle over the long haul

Their lives in the movement were characterized by great joy, great sorrow and great love.

The parable we heard this morning is about weeds and wheat and he ends his story with the command when its harvest time to 'collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn"

Jesus knew it was very difficult to tell the difference between weeds and the good stuff.

From the beginning of time, darnal, the weed, looked like wheat.

And as the darnal and wheat grow, there is the problem of intertwined roots.

In today's story an enemy has sown the weeds.

The well-meaning servants ask the farmer if he wants them to weed.....

And the answer is "no,let them grow together until the harvest because in gathering the weeds you could uproot the tender wheat along with them.

Here's the core of Jesus message: Leave the weeds to me. You just worry about growing up as wheat.

This is difficult advice in this day of finger-pointing and name-calling, when we feel like we need to point out who tries to keep us from the path of doing good, when we make excuses for or justify our behavior.

One person's downfall is another person's upturn after all;

One person's weed is another person's wheat.

Such negative energy only perpetuates negative energy, sometimes derailing even the best intentions.

The potential for negativity is not confined to this householders field or our lawns.

Negativity is not just in the world outside our church walls.

Unfortunately, the church has caught this fever as well.....

Christians, right and left, too often strut around, robed in self-righteousness, believing that those who disagree with them are weeds, while they themselves are the splendor of the garden.

There were Roman laws against sowing that "darnal" stuff in a neighbors field.

Somebody probably put it there on purpose

So who did it? And why? And even more to the point, what do we do now?

I believe what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples and the crowds that often gathered around him to hear a word or two of encouragement is to leave the judgments to him.

Don't get caught up in the negativity the weeds bring in your life, but continue about your business, doing the best you can do.

We just observed a national holiday.....250 years Brett Stephens who regularly writes a column in the New York Times reflected on this 250th anniversary.....

He wrote about Judge Learned Hand who delivered a brief but timeless address in New York in 1944...'

In his address, Hand warned that "the spirit of liberty cannot be safe-guarded by constitutions, laws or courts.....

Instead the spirit of liberty lay in a combination of humility, curiosity, and restraint".

So, Brett Stephen asks, as we observe the 250th anniversary of independence, what is the spirit of liberty?

He goes on to write: It is the spirit of public example, of presidential character defined by modesty, composure, integrity.

It is leadership that ensures faithful execution of the laws by submitting to them fully, transparently;

Of statesmanship that never mistakes grandiosity for greatness, or rhetoric for reality, or monuments for meaning.

It is the spirit of personal responsibility; of knowing that the right to make democratic choices requires us to own those choices rather than find scapegoats.

It is the spirit that comes out of the knowledge that we cannot remain free if we fail to understand all that it took to become free

It is the spirit that has a bias toward openness –

- The open hand of a generous nation
- The open door of a capacious country
- The open mind of an inquisitive people - a spirit that is confident we can be all this and still hold on to our wallets and borders and truest convictions

A spirit that asks us to examine ourselves far more often than we celebrate ourselves

It is a spirit that knows we have foreign enemies, and that to defeat those enemies we need friends who cannot be treated with disdain or allies of convenience

It is the spirit that knows the deep purpose of free speech

It is the spirit of becoming; a spirit that asks that our identity as Americans should not be centrally defined by where our ancestors came from or how they were treated on arrival but by who we are and what we aspire to be

And it is an optimistic spirit.....not because any of our endeavors are guaranteed success, which they are not, or because our better angels always win, since they do not.

It is because, even in folly and failure, so painfully evident now, we still have the chance to try again --- the ultimate spirit of America.

Jesus understands that we are consistently off the mark when we try to make a moral assessment of a stranger, friend, colleague, family member or neighbor.

So he orders us to put our energy elsewhere.....

He orders and encourages us to put our energy someplace positive, someplace that will allow us to continue to grow and mature,

Someplace that will help others develop around us, so that they will, in turn, help others around them with positive energy

Through this parable Jesus tells us that the church absolutely must not offer condemnation and judgment

We must not assume it is our job to do the “weeding”, sending out only negativity

But Jesus also is indicating that concern and compassion alone from the church or from any person or group are not enough

The church must offer a “yes”a positive force, to empower the “no”

The church must serve not only as a reminder but as a propellant for “yes”, the “yes” of the most tirelessly positive source of power in the universe to all of those who struggle to say “no”

The “yes” that energizes and revitalizes those who say “no” to move ahead

The “yes” that comes from the love of Christ and the wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit

May it be so! Amen!