

Sermon 23 July 2023

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

This parable has points of comparison with last week's parable, the Parable of the Sower. The weeds referred to are actually darnel and in some versions the word *darnel* is used rather than *weed*. This is quite important because darnel is very similar in appearance to wheat and it is only when the ears appear that the difference becomes noticeable. By then the roots are so closely entwined that it is virtually impossible to pull out the darnel without damaging the roots of the wheat. So it is after harvesting that the darnel is sorted from the wheat, as the farmer directed in the parable.

Before we move on to explain why this similarity is important, let's just quickly refer to the enemy who has planted the darnel seeds amongst the farmer's wheat. This, if not perhaps a common practice, was sometimes done. This enemy reminds us that unfortunately there do exist in the world evil forces/people who, for whatever reasons, want to derail all the good that is being done by so many. We do tend to focus on the bad and the negative but in reality there is a huge amount of good being carried out everywhere every day. If there wasn't, we would have self-destructed a long time ago, but that is another story for another time.

So bottom line, evil does exist and we have to be on the lookout for it and do what we can to combat it. It reminds me of the story of the elderly lady who would come out every morning on the steps of her porch, raise her arms to the sky and shout, 'Praise God!'

One day, an atheist moved into the house next door. Over time, he became irritated at the little old lady. So every morning, he would step out onto his porch and yell after her, 'There is no God!'

Time passed with the two of them carrying on in this way every day. Then one morning, in the middle of winter, the little old lady stepped onto her porch and shouted, 'Praise God! Lord, I have no food and I am hungry. Please provide for me, Lord.'

The next morning, she stepped onto her porch and there were two bags of groceries sitting there. 'Praise God,' she cried out, 'He has provided for me.' The atheist jumped out of the hedge and shouted, 'There is no God. I bought those groceries.'

The little old lady threw her arms into the air and shouted, 'Praise God! You have provided groceries for me and you have made the devil pay for them!'

So back to why this similarity between darnel and wheat is so important. As I said before, we know there is a lot of badness or sinfulness out there. It can be in the form of attitudes, such as racism, sexism etc. It can be some sort of addiction. I think one of the most common forms of wrongdoing or iniquity is dishonesty. There are, of course, varying degrees of dishonesty, from mild falsehoods to the more extreme corruption. Sometimes, the lines become a little blurred. We can be quite clever at covering up our deception. Hence the difficulty in recognising the darnel amongst the wheat.

However, there comes a time when our waywardness will be discovered and we will be judged accordingly. Hence the separation of the darnel from the wheat at harvest. Let me illustrate with a story.

A young man named Ping lived in a faraway country. The king of the country was getting old and he needed to find a successor. For the king, honesty was of paramount importance, so he devised a way to find his successor who would have honesty and integrity.

The king sent out a tiny seed to the young men of the country. This seed was to be planted and nourished to the best of each man's ability.

Ping really wanted to be the new king. When he received his seed he went out and obtained a very beautiful pot, good soil, fertiliser and planted his seed. He watered it and nurtured it and watched over it carefully. But nothing happened!

He moved his plant to another area with more sun. He watched it, watered it, nourished it and still nothing happened. He went to his father and asked him what he should do. His father suggested he put it into a different pot, which he did, but still nothing happened.

Ping was so disappointed and the time was drawing near to go to the king and present his plant. The day finally arrived. Ping was so embarrassed because everyone else had such beautiful plants. He sat at the back of the hall, crestfallen.

The king started to look over all the plants and he was not smiling. In fact, he was frowning. He kept looking and all at once he saw Ping's empty pot and he called Ping up to the front. The king announced that Ping will be the next king.

The king said Ping would be the next king because of his honesty. The king also expressed his disappointment that there were so many dishonest men. He told them that he had boiled all the seeds before he sent them out, so that none of the seeds would grow.

Just as the dandelion is separated from the wheat, so in the end we will all be judged. We will be judged by others, we will be judged by life, and ultimately and most importantly, we will be judged by God. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, *'For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done.'*

Let me finish with three quotes. Proverbs 12:19 *'Truth stands the test of time; lies are soon exposed.'* From our first reading, *'So then, putting away falsehood, let us all speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.'* Ephesians 4:25.

The final quote is from Joseph Wirthlin, American businessman and religious leader, *'Honesty is of God and dishonesty is of the devil; the devil was a liar from the beginning.'* Love it!

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