

Weeding

Menno Mennonite Church

July 19 2026

Purpose: To explore the way that God meets us where and as we are, prioritizing grace in our midst.

Message: The judgements that we might apply to the world around us are best reserved for God and the fullness of God's grace

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 (I will read); Psalm 86:11-17 (Secondary Text)

Synopsis: We are given to focusing on the problem when we know one to be on hand. The stuff that rankles and is less than our best ambition can preoccupy us to a huge extent. In this parable Jesus continues to characterize the kingdom as the working of God's will in God's good time. The judgement that we avoid here is not ours to apply; it is the way that God can and will meet us along the way.

Matthew 13:24-30 36-43

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field.

²⁵ While people were sleeping,
an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away.

²⁶ When the stalks sprouted and bore grain,
then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The servants of the landowner came and said to him,
‘Master, didn’t you plant good seed in your field?
Then how is it that it has weeds?’

²⁸ “ ‘An enemy has done this,’ he answered.

“The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather them?’

²⁹ “But the landowner said, ‘No, because if you gather the weeds,
you’ll pull up the wheat along with them.

³⁰ Let both grow side by side until the harvest.
And at harvesttime I’ll say to the harvesters,
“First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned.
But bring the wheat into my barn.” ’ ’ ”

³⁶ Jesus left the crowds and went into the house.
His disciples came to him and said,
“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ Jesus replied, “The one who plants the good seed is the Human One.
³⁸ The field is the world.
And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom.

But the weeds are the followers of the evil one.
³⁹ The enemy who planted them is the tempter.
The harvest is the end of the present age.
The harvesters are the angels.

⁴⁰ Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire,
so it will be at the end of the present age.

⁴¹ The Human One will send his angels,
and they will gather out of his kingdom
all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin.

⁴² He will throw them into a burning furnace.
People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom.
Those who have ears should hear.”

My recollections of summer were fairly mundane. We had our routine. Get up, do the chores that were left conspicuously inside our cereal bowls by our by then working mom least we claim they escaped our attention, get on with what there was to do so we could spend our afternoon less directed, usually riding across town to the city pool for a couple of hours of refreshment before returning home to complete our 6 day a week paper route by bike before supper. These days those chore lists were fairly predictable: spend the morning crawling through the garden on hands and knees alternately picking beans or pulling weeds. Always pulling weeds in the two garden plots that we looked after on a couple of city lots. Sometimes it felt that the weeds far outnumbered the beans at least by volume. Naturally there were those times where we were hit with “what happened to my trial plot of Kohlrabi?” or whatever esoteric item that we were trying to grow that year (one time my brother even took on cotton in an environment never designed for it). Inevitably the story was fairly similar after a bit of investigation: that scraggly looking seemingly good for nothing plant that we diligently had cleansed from the garden was not the plant we were sent to kill and the experiment failed owing to collateral damage. If the garden was bad, the flower beds were far worse. I think in due course we convinced our dad to exempt us from that task when we had eloquently argued by example that we were not best suited to the task by the power of persistent ineptitude if nothing else. Sometimes the cure is worse than the disease. For evidence I give you weeds.

I will readily admit that I really didn't want to take on this text this morning. There is a lot here that makes me itchy to think about, let alone to talk about. I was not able to find a single time in my now 20 years of ministry where I engaged this one. I even started my thoughts on something else entirely but this one would not leave me alone. That, right or wrong is usually when I want to pay attention because it is the time where the text might have something to say more than I want to actually speak it myself. So here we are. Now what do we do with this?

This agrarian metaphor is in the latter half of the chapter we started last week. Matthew 13 is full, completely full of these wonderful naturalistic similes and description that are doing one thing: describing the kingdom of heaven and its various attributes. Note that in the reading I gave you this morning we jumped over the mustard seed and the yeast as further explanations to the crowds of what we were talking about. This kingdom of heaven that we are given here is a different one than what we are accustomed to. It is far grittier than the shadowing branches of a mustard seed. We are back to planting, only this time the hurdles to productive growth go

beyond the natural systems of the way the seeds fall and are actively thwarted by the opposition at work to ruin a good yield. A couple millennia before being roundup ready and apparently fresh out of youth labor to send into the fields with a hoe and the expectation that they don't come back until the weeds are gone, the response was to simply allow things to continue through the cycle and deal with things in the fullness of time and harvest. The problem is there and it will be dealt with, but not without allowing the wholeness to take its course first.

I will readily confess that what has likely kept me well away from this text for so long is the way that I read it, the way that we all ready it. Like the sower and the seed of last week, we look at these parables as speaking to us in the way that we imagine God might speak to us: with judgement and expectation. Or in other words how we often speak to ourselves and then we transfer to God who must be thinking the exact same thing. If we think we are as bad as we are, our logic goes, what must God think of me? Combine that with a theological tradition that has long relied of the tradition of fear and expectation rather than a exploration of a Kingdom that is founded and functions within the grace of God and we get quite uncomfortable when we start talking about fire and judgement in a place and time like this.

But that assumes that our primary concern is for the weeds in this case. In the story it is the people doing the will of the master who were most eager to go and get to weeding out the intruders least there be damage to the crop. Later in private, the disciples come to ask about what the meaning of the weeds were. It is rather telling that what we do and where we go with this is to make it all about the problem of the failure, the problem to be solved, rather than to consider the whole of the system before us. Jesus, the master planter and good sower of the story is well aware of the problems afoot. It is a concern, but it is not the primary concern to be dealt with. The good planted knows that there is time and opportunity to address this issue. Focusing exclusively on the problem neglects the surrounding wheat that will get damaged along the way. Sitting with the imagery, I think that one of the things we're meant to see here is that as the good seed of faith and spiritual life matures, it becomes stronger and able to withstand the presence of the weeds around it. It can bear its good fruit even in the presence of weeds. In a sense, this is a reminder that we can take responsibility for ourselves and not blame others for why we do not grow.

It is also an utterly realistic understanding of the way of the world and the way of the kingdom. We are reminded here that the Kingdom of God does not live all by itself in isolation

and that God knows full well where the adversary is up to. There is an adversary. There is that which opposes that which is of the kingdom. We must remember that even if we do not always know how to speak of this or how best to name it without introducing a whole world of meaning that we would just as soon leave to the wayside. Our discomfort with an idea does not mean that this idea is somehow no longer meaningful. The adversary is alive and well, and will be through the very end, says Jesus. But we do not need to be constrained by that fact because ALL of this rests with God.

What I think this text does for us is what it says on the label: give us some rather good advice about the meaning and impact of the kingdom. Among our many attributes as Anabaptists is the insistence that we (and many times that is a capital WE) are the church without spot or wrinkle. We are the ones to get it right above and beyond all costs. Borne of a desire to call each other to true expressions of Christian love and examples, we have expended great efforts in maintaining a church that can live up to its name. But for all the ways that this well meaning effort has gone on, I know we can also tell plenty of stories where the efforts of keeping the fields clean has done a great deal of harm to those who were there. We have gone looking for weeds, pulled out the roots and damaged those along side those who we may have targeted. In the other extreme we have too often allowed our senses to remain dull and not to call to account that which is truly harmful among us for fear of making the body look bad or come to disgrace. In both extremes we fail miserably to take the lessons of this parable to heart. Here we have Jesus readily and explicitly addressing an all too obvious truth: that the Kingdom of God is completely and utterly human despite being shaped and called by God. As such, it will never be the pristine monoculture that we think it ought to be. We would rather deny the weeds are there than to turn and face them. We would rather obsess about the petty misdeeds that we can safely condemn than to look with honesty at the ways that our fields are not well. We are much further ahead spiritually and politically to drop the pretense that the church is perfect, or ever can be, and to confess that there is much in this that is murky at best. The difference of the kingdom is that we can name this and still turn in trust to God's good work.

In the midst of so many other scripture passages that talk about the need to guard against evil in our midst, both in our own hearts and in our communities, how do we hold the tension with a passage like this one? For some, this is the question of the "red letters" and the epistles, Jesus versus Paul. But if we take in the whole scope of the scriptures, no matter the New

Testament text, the emphasis is on our protection and who is the judge. Throughout the guidance given to us about how to live as the church community, we are reminded that being together as God's people, his body, is for our good. And we are warned that the adversary will try to trick and play on that call to gather to manipulate and cause harm and take advantage. The judgement in the end is not ours to undertake: it is God's good practice as the best Gardener that will make all things right in the fullness of time. Does that mean that absolutely everything goes? Of course not. But it does invite us to lay down the responsibility perhaps long enough for God to take on good work within in.

It is God's good pleasure to take on the weeding. We are reminded that God's seed falls where it will, can encounter the soil as it is, and can even withstand the worst that the adversary can throw at it. In the end, all will be brought together, all will be purified, and the harvest will come to fullness. Our work is to trust the planter no matter what the season, and anticipate the growth.

May we grow in God's kingdom in all times, knowing that God's goodness will tend us and hold us in all things, now and always. Amen.