

Stand and let's read the passage together...**Mt. 13:24-30.**

Everyone knows it's illegal to impersonate a police officer. I say we extend the law to include Elvis impersonators! The ones I've seen should be illegal but just this past week someone told me they have a friend who makes \$6,000 a show pretending to be Elvis. Some people are good at impersonating others...Slides of impersonators...

There are a hundreds of impersonators in the world but there are hundreds of thousands of imposters. That's the gist of the story Jesus tells in **Mt. 13:24-30**. Jesus explained the kingdom of God through parables. In the parable of the wheat and tares, He explains that, ***The kingdom, in its present form, is one in which those who are true believers and those who are imposters will live side by side until a future harvest when the King returns.*** Let's take a look at four very important lessons in this parable.

1. "Weeds" are a natural outgrowth of a fallen creation. In the aftermath of Adam and Eve's rebellion, God said, **"Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you and you will eat the plants of the field."** **Genesis 3:17-18.** The plants and the thorns grow together on this fallen planet. Jesus used this agricultural reality to point out that just as there will always be thorns and thistles living among the good plants in a fallen world there will always be the unbelieving living among the believing. It was not uncommon in the first century for one man to sabotage his neighbor's harvest by sowing weeds in the other man's field. This is the picture that Jesus paints in **vv. 24-28a**. The enemy, Satan, is relentlessly positioning those who are in his kingdom in the midst of those who are in God's kingdom.

Notice the weeds are sown "in the world" not in the church. Listen to Jesus' explanation to the disciples: **"Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.' And He said, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one'"**(**Mt.13:36-38**).

This is not a parable about the church. It is true that in this weedy world, there will be plenty of weeds finding their way into the church. It is true that not everyone who goes to church is a believer. The old adage is true: sitting in a church makes you are Christian about like sitting in an oven makes you a biscuit. This parable does not teach that we should ignore sin in the church. There are ample NT scripture passages that regulate behavior in the church and there are even times when people are "put out" of the church because they refuse to repent.

2. It is hard to distinguish the weeds from the wheat. There are weeds in the Middle East which look exactly like wheat right up until the time of harvest. These weeds or "tares" refers to a tall grassy weed called "darnels." Once darnels get into the soil they creep everywhere making it difficult to get them out without damaging the good plants.

This was particularly hard for the disciples to grasp as they learned about the kingdom of God. The prophets said that when God's kingdom came the King would make an immediate separation between the righteous and unrighteous and usher in a new stainless community. The righteous would reign and the unrighteous would be judged and shown

the door. What the prophets didn't see was a gap between the first and second coming of the King. This is what Jesus refers to as, "the mystery of the kingdom" (v. 11). This interim period was not known to the prophets but Jesus blesses the disciples by unveiling this mystery (vv. 16-17). During this interim time, between His first and second comings, the weeds and wheat grow up together.

Like the disciples we wish it were otherwise. In this world of gray we long for black and white. We want to identify the "real Christians" as opposed to the posers and imposters. In our zeal, we sometimes take matters into our own hands and make snap judgments about people. There is a common word for this – prejudice, and we all have the disease. I saw a clever lesson on prejudice this past week. Remember "Deep Thoughts," by Jack Handey? Take a look...

3. Pulling weeds is subject to human error...v. 24. In our desire to exclude those who are not like us, we can do serious harm to the work of the kingdom. One of my least favorite jobs as a kid was pulling weeds. It seems like that's about the only job you can get as a young man so, whether I pulled weeds voluntarily for pay, or involuntarily because my dad told me to, it was no fun. There are some weeds that are easy to pull up; the free standing, long-stemmed, shallow-rooted weeds were fun. One tug and the whole thing comes up, roots and all. But then there were those grassy, low-lying, deep-rooted weeds that entangled themselves with the good plants. Those are no fun at all. If you get frustrated enough (or hot enough or tired enough) and you're not careful you can pull up a lot of the good stuff with the bad.

In this world any attempt to "judge others" is a risky business. That's why Jesus warned, **"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."** Matthew 7:1-2 Those who appear to be most spiritual are often least spiritual. Those who seem to be farthest from Christ are often closest to the cross. The person who looks like a weed may turn out to be better wheat than the rest of us! Jesus warns us that God has not authorized us to decide who is and is not a Christian.

Remember, God didn't send Jesus Christ to judge the world but to save it. Most of us know **John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."** Listen to v. 17, **"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."** It is not the church's function to get out the weed whacker and start hacking away at the weeds. We have not been called to weed the world. Satan will continue to sow and oversow in this world because he loves to deceive by imitation (2 Cor. 11:13-15). But it is not our responsibility to try to find those tares and rip them out. In fact, history reminds us that every attempt to do so ends in disaster. At certain times the church has grabbed the reins of political power and invariably power was corrupted for the sake of destroying "the apostates." For example, we're still apologizing for the Crusades when, one of the most abysmal periods of human history, crusaders in Europe planned to take the holy places of Israel back from the Muslims. In the process they massacred people all across Europe. They did it all in the name of Jesus Christ. In one village three thousand Jews were trampled with the Crusader's horses because they said they were apostates. In another shameful episode as Crusaders reached the Promised

Land, they killed all of the inhabitants of an Arab village. When they turned some of the bodies over they were wearing crosses. It never occurred to the crusaders that Arabs with brown skin could possibly be followers of Christ.

4. In the end, God will sort out the weeds and the wheat...v. 30. The Bible says that God will judge all men at the end of the age and the angels are going to be the reapers. Listen to Jesus' explanation of the parable again: **“And the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then, THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (13:39-43)**

Jesus is saying through the parable, "During this interim period between my first and second coming, do more sowing and less weeding. When I return, the angels will do the reaping."

Three affirmations as we continue to worship:

1. God is gracious. In the natural world weeds can never become wheat. In God's supernatural kingdom weeds CAN become wheat. We were all "bad seed" before we were transformed by Jesus Christ. Now we are children of the Kingdom – plantings of the Lord. We're not here by accident. We are planted by the Lord where He wants us. Let's get busy throwing seed.

2. God is patient. God is patient toward all not wanting any to perish. He has no desire to lose a single plant. Listen to God's self-description when He appeared before Moses:

“Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.” Exodus 34:6-7

Peter says it this way: **“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?” 2 Peter 3:9-11**

Jesus will come again and this world will come to screeching halt. Only God knows the time table but He will not return until He has gathered all of His children into the kingdom. He may be waiting for you. Maybe today is the day you will say, "Jesus, you're my King."

3. God's righteous judgment is coming. The parable of the weeds should be a warning to some here today. There is coming a day when God WILL separate the wheat from the weeds. **“He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” Ex. 34:7b.** Listen to John

the Baptist's warning about Jesus: **“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** Matthew 3:11-12. When Jesus comes back He'll have His winnowing fork in His hand so make sure that you are the wheat and not the weeds or chaff. People who impersonate Elvis are harmless; obnoxious but harmless. People who pretend to be followers of Christ will pay a high price for their deception.

The parable of the weeds should also be an encouragement to us as a church. I want to be part of a community that is wide open to all people whether hard-hearted, shallow-hearted, half-hearted or whole-hearted. Let the lukewarm come; along with the puzzled pessimist, the messed up materialist, the addicted or the afflicted. I want to be a community where everyone is welcome. I want to be part of a community where weeds and wheat grow up together because you never truly know when God is going to do a miracle and turn weeds into wheat.

So let's close the service with a time of confession and repentance. If you want to make sure that you are a child of God use this time to pray and ask God to forgive you of your sins and put His Spirit within you. You will never be the same. If you are a believer and you find yourself judging others, pray and ask God to break your heart, ask Him for His grace to love those you would rather hate. Ask God to forgive you for putting yourself on the judgment seat when you don't belong there. And then ask Him to give you a heart for the lost and courage to tell them the Good News of the kingdom of God. Let's worship the Lord of the Harvest.