

### Genesis 28:10-19 (New Revised Standard Version)

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

### Matthew 13:24-30, 36-39 (New Revised Standard Version)

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" Then he left the crowds and went into the house.

And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

Our Bible study was going through Genesis chapter by chapter,

and when we got to the stories about Jacob, one of the participants

got very upset that "a sneaky and conniving lowlife like Jacob

was even mentioned in Holy Scripture." She angrily insisted,

**"How could Jacob possibly be beneficial to anyone's faith?"**

She pointed out that when his brother was hungry,

he wouldn't even share a bowl of stew with him

until he agreed to trade away his birthright,

his rightful share of the family inheritance.

In the Genesis passage we read today, Jacob was on the run.

Jacob was all alone, afraid and fleeing for his life from Esau.

In perhaps the first case in history of identity theft,  
he had exploited his aging father's blindness  
and deceived Isaac into falsely giving him  
the paternal blessing intended for Esau.

That was finally too much for Esau, who decided to kill him,  
and so his sneaky deceptions had finally caught up with Jacob.

Now he had lost it all, family, home and his future.

All alone and estranged in the wilderness he stops for the night,  
and falls into the exhausted darkness of a guilty-troubled sleep,  
**of having to face the truth and the consequences**  
**of his dishonest scheming and lack of integrity.**

But then, there at Bethel,  
while running away, Jacob has an encounter with the Lord.

**There God offers a vision of unexpected blessings and hope.**

Surely such people, like Jacob need to be dealt with like weeds,  
but instead, God graciously spoke to Jacob in a mystical vision.

It's not the harsh judgment Jacob deserves, but incredible grace,

God's promise and assurance to be with him and bless him, vs. 13~15

And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; ...  
Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I  
have done what I have promised you."

God was binding himself to this dubious and devious character,  
extending to him all the promises made earlier to Abraham.

The point is not that Jacob deserved God's kindness or blessing,  
for he was hardly a model or exemplar of godliness and faith,  
**because so far, Jacob has done nothing to justify God's favor.**

Jacob has lived shamelessly, yet God promises to love and bless him.

Certainly we reject Jacob's deplorable lack of integrity and ethics,  
but what an amazing and wonderful and generous picture of our God,  
who loves even Jacob, even before Jacob has started to reform,  
**even before that grace had begun to reshape his life.**

In Hebrew, the word, 'Jacob' means 'a cheat, a sneak and a conniver',  
and so far he had most certainly lived up to the meaning of his name.  
He'd exploited and cheated his brother Esau, deceived  
his father Isaac, will manipulate his uncle Laban,  
and more than once, even try to cut a deal with God.

It makes good sense to pluck out a weed like Jacob from our garden.  
We'd expect to pull such a weed before they can cause more harm,  
but God perceives in ways we do not, as Isaiah writes, 55:8-9,  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are  
higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God has promised to never forget us, never to reject or abandon us,  
because truly, his gracious love and mercy has no limits or end.  
**We are promised and assured that in the end, God will sort it all out.**

In the parable we read earlier from Matthew 13, Jesus describes  
what it means for us to live under God's sovereignty and authority.  
In the story, a land owner has sown his fields with good seed,  
but then at night an enemy sows weed seed among the wheat.

When both start to come up together,  
the servants want to pull up the contaminating weeds,  
but instead the master says, just leave it for now, vs. 29-30  
'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together  
until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned,  
but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

In the parable, part of the problem with plucking out the weeds,  
is the difficulty of distinguishing between the wheat and the weeds.

The particular Greek word that is translated here as *the weeds*,  
looks nearly identical to wheat when that plant first sprouts,  
and later on its roots will closely intertwine with the wheat.

The wise master recognizes that by rooting out the weeds immediately,  
they will end up doing more damage the crop of wheat than  
just leaving the weeds to grow and mature would have done.

Now I am pretty sure that most any farmer of Mesilla Valley,  
whose chili field has become overgrown and corrupted with weeds,  
unlike the parable, would probably spray with a herbicide  
or re-plow the field and start planting all over again.  
**But Jesus is not teaching agronomy or agricultural practice.**

Jesus is explaining and describing the Kingdom of God,  
by painting a word-picture of God's purpose and gracious love  
by showing what it means to trust & submit to God's mercy and truth.

You can't uproot the weeds  
without also damaging and destroying some of the wheat ---  
and Jesus loves the wheat far too much to allow that.

In addition, it not **our place** to rid the world of its 'weediness'  
for when the time of harvest does actually come,  
it will be angels and **not mortals** who do the reaping.

Historically, the Church has really struggled with this parable,  
for we'd much rather be rid of the weeds as quickly as we can,  
and to self-righteously silence opposing voices right now.

And how many people have been shamed, wounded or driven away  
by well-meaning Christians and Churches on a moral crusade  
with focus on judgement and rancor rather than grace and hope?

The point of farming is to grow and harvest the desired crop.

The purpose is to grow wheat and not just to wipe out the weeds.

Uprooting weeds, even if it eliminates all the weeds  
is hardly worth destroying any of the crop of wheat.

If we focus on rooting out weeds, we lose sight of our true mission,  
which is to be fruitful, faithful and ready for the coming harvest.

How tragic to give more effort and energy to weeding the garden  
than to planting and tending and nurturing the desired crop.

It may not be good farming practice to just let the weeds grow,  
but in this parable Jesus is calling for patience and toleration,  
to live in trust and joy, in relationship with Jesus Christ.

Yet this is not a call to blind passivity, apathy or inactivity,  
but a reminder that we not have the full wisdom or ability  
to judge with certainty enough to uproot only the weeds,  
and that our efforts to destroy and pluck up all the weeds  
may do more harm than good, in also destroying the crop.

So we are challenged to somehow, hold together in a balanced tension,  
the **purity**, the **unity**, and the **peace** of the church.

And the only way that we can hope to accomplish all three,  
is by focusing more on nurturing and growing the good seed,  
rather than on uprooting and destroying all that offends.

And in humility, to recognize that we cannot and will not  
accomplish that task in our own time or by our own means,  
but we must trust the wisdom, power and purpose of God,  
that God will accomplish his own plan in perfection,  
in God's own way and in God's own perfect timing.

Nurture the wheat, and wait for God's harvest to deal with the weeds.  
If we choose to focus on uprooting and pulling out all the weeds,  
we will lose sight of our true purpose – which is to be fruitful.

As Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: Romans 12:18-21

Live in harmony with one another; If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ... Do not  
be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now that does not mean that we just let the weeds grow rampant,  
or that in the face of evil we just sit passively by doing nothing  
or that the issues and concerns before us do not really matter.

**The parable warns against us trying to eradicate the world's weeds,  
but it's not telling us to ignore the weeds of sin in our own life.**

The challenge is a question of finding true wisdom and balance.  
It's to determine and focus on what is God's priority & purpose,  
by faithfully discerning God's call and God's will for us,  
so we don't interfere with that which is God's part alone,  
**but in hopeful trust, confident that God's harvest is indeed sure.**

During the early Reformation, a time when Catholics and Protestants  
were viciously attacking and mercilessly killing each other with  
armies of Christians fighting and accused heretics being burned,  
Martin Luther preached a remarkably gracious sermon on this text:

"This Gospel teaches how we should conduct ourselves toward these heretics and false teachers.  
We are not to uproot nor destroy them, but let both grow together. ... for he who errs today may find  
the truth tomorrow.

Who knows when the Word of God may touch his heart? But if he be burned at the stake, or  
otherwise destroyed, it is thereby assured that he can never find the truth; and thus the Word of God is  
snatched from him, and he is lost, who otherwise might have been saved."

The truth is, we are called to put up with the weeds for a while,  
while God accomplishes his will before harvest comes.

Why? Because God would rather endure his field corrupted by weeds,  
than to lose any of the wheat before it's time to harvest.

In the natural world of plants and seeds,  
whatever gets planted is exactly what germinates and matures,  
but that's not always true when it comes to human beings.

**Seeds don't change, but often times, people do.**

If you plant a **daisy** seed, it will always grow to produce a daisy.  
Yet, someone named '**Daisy**', might very well repent and change.

Throughout the Bible and even in our own life experience,  
sometimes the people who may act and look a lot like weeds,  
will in time somehow manage to mature and change  
as their lives blossom and flourish walking with God.

When God's Spirit gets hold of a seemingly lost and unworthy weed,  
they may be wonderfully transformed by God's grace and purpose  
into new creatures who delight in serving to please the Lord,

**We don't know what God will do with weeds we would reject & exclude.**

During the first century, there was a certain man,  
a Pharisee with official sanction and authority  
to travel from city to city persecuting Christians,  
and have them arrested, imprisoned and even put to death.  
He was a violent and dangerous weed, who clearly needed to be plucked.

Then one day he met Jesus along the way, on the road to Damascus,  
where Jesus converted that **Saul the weed** into **Paul the wheat**.  
What a loss it would have been had **Saul the weed** been uprooted,  
before Jesus could transform him into **Paul the Wheat**,  
**the Lord's faithful servant and missionary to gentiles.**

The growing season is long, the harvest has been graciously delayed,  
and we're not to give up on any of God's precious people,  
not even the difficult, the foolish or the unworthy weed.

As we read in 2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish,  
but all to come to repentance.

It comes down to this, as a community of faith, as a church,  
there is variety, both wheat & weeds interspersed among us.

Our call is to trust God and not in our own understanding,  
and to wait in hope for God's time, for God's harvest to come,  
lest we damage the wheat while attacking the weeds.

Growing the wheat is the important thing, and that's why we exist,  
and if we concentrate on the weeds, we aren't nurturing the wheat.  
It's not our place or task to risk damaging God's crop of wheat,  
by judging, rejecting or expelling weeds from God's garden.

That's not a tidy or neat answer, nor an easy or comfortable answer,  
but it is God's Word. It is God's will & it is Christ's command,  
**and the gentle way that we are called to live, to serve & to be.**

Too often the Church wasted its efforts complaining about the weeds  
rather than using our hearts and resources to nurture the wheat.

In this parable that Jesus told and Romans 12:21,

His servants saw the weeds and asked him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather and uproot them?' But the  
Master replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them... let them grow until harvest.  
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.