

➤ ***O let the power fall on me***

Call to Worship

Come, people of God.

Let us gather with hearts overflowing with delight and thankfulness.

**We are a company of faith blessed by God.**

God's name is to be celebrated in all generations.

**With joy and gladness, we praise God forever and ever.**

We worship God together as we pray...

Prayer

Merciful God, whose goodness fills our world, we give you praise. The wonders of your creation are all around us and fill our lives beyond our deserving. We marvel at your creative power and are grateful for the place that you have given to us within your creation. So, we worship acknowledging your greatness, rejoicing in your love and celebrating your blessings. Be with us as we lift our hearts in adoration and as we confess our sin...

We confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven, and to our sisters and brothers in Christ, that we have sinned by our own fault, in thought, word, and deed. We pray that God Almighty might have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen

Words of Hope

May Almighty God have mercy on us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins and give us time to amend our lives.

It is the grace and power of God that draws us together, that inspires us to be gracious in our responsiveness to the needs of others, to be powerful in the practice of love as the foundation for faithful living. In a spirit of gratitude, we relax and rejoice in the presence of God who forgives and loves us.

➤ ***Teach me, God, to wonder***

**704**

Scripture

**Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

**You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.**

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

**Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.**

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

**If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.**

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.**

**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

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. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### **Message**    *Hearing Good News*

Theologian Barbara Brown Taylor tells about a plant called *kudzu* that was brought to the United States to decorate the Japanese pavilion at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. This exotic import became a popular shade plant, a hay and forage crop and eventually as the God-given solution to erosion after the Great Depression. Because it grows as much as twelve inches in 24 hours and up to fifty feet in a single season it was a natural to hold the soil and so came to be seen as the crop of the future. In time the vine's chief virtue – its amazing rate of growth – turned out to be its fatal flaw. It grew over everything and choked out other valuable crops – it was even reported to break machinery. So, it was demoted to weed status – a plant that does more harm than good<sup>1</sup>

Many of us on Vancouver Island have similar experience with blackberries – the plants are desirable in some ways for their fruit but they are so invasive that they take over and choke out everything in their path. Someone also planted a bit of bamboo behind our townhouse some years ago and it is starting to encroach on everything else – even more problematic despite its beauty since it is almost impossible to cut through and remove.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between a good plant – one you want to grow and cherish – and a bad one – something to be uprooted and burned. And it seems that the same plant can be both good and bad depending upon your perspective. That is part of

the challenge Jesus is addressing in his parable from Matthew's gospel today. He is not giving gardening tips or proposing new agricultural strategies. Jesus is doing what Jesus is usually doing – he is making a theological point.

This is sometimes referred to as the *parable of the wheat and the tares/weeds* but truly understood I think it is a parable about the *field* – about the collective experience. It should be interpreted as a comment on the collective experience of the whole world – or a whole congregation – or a whole person. In all cases we find an unavoidable, inseparable mixture of good and bad – wheat and weeds together sown. According to this parable, we should expect that to be true.

There is no mention of retaliation upon the one who comes in the night sowing weeds and we are told explicitly not to attempt to get rid of the weeds ourselves. Pulling up weed plants will also unavoidably pull up wheat roots – our efforts to make things pure and perfect will only make matters worse! It seems that we also should not expect that God is going to come and take out all the bad things and make everything and everyone wholly good and pure until God is good and ready to do so.

However, all is not lost – all is not left muddled and pointless. *At the end*, the weeds are separated and burned. *At the end*, what is pleasing to God is taken into God's care and keeping. **Think of yourself as the *field*. At the harvest, the weeds in you are removed, and the wheat in you is gathered in.**

Jesus says that the enemy sows a weed among the wheat that actually looks very much like wheat – is quite difficult to distinguish from wheat until the time of harvest. So, it seems that perhaps the farmer is right on in his assessment that the servants – we – are not equipped for the task of pulling up weeds without damaging the wheat. We might even go so far as to agree with Robert Farrar Capon who says that, "since good and evil in this world commonly inhabit not only the same field but even the same individual human beings – since, there are no unqualified good guys any more than there are any unqualified bad guys – the only result of a truly dedicated campaign to get rid of evil will be the abolition of literally everybody."<sup>2</sup> **The good news is that God is in charge so we are to *let both grow together* – suffer both – forgive both – *until the harvest*.**

So far, so good – the challenge really comes when we move on to verse 36 and the disciples' desire for clarification of what seems obvious and good theology. *Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field*. They show how radically they have missed the point

in the very framing of their question – turning the parable into something else entirely. Jesus tells a story of a kingdom that was like a man who sowed good seed in his field and then had weeds sown in by his enemy. They heard a story about weeds – period. “What he gave them was a judiciously balanced analogy of the complex relationship between good and evil; but what they received was an out-of-whack fable about the problem of evil alone.”<sup>3</sup>

If you read only the parable, you can wonder just what it might mean to let the wheat and the weeds co-exist and grow together for now. You ponder how and why pulling up the weeds would also threaten the wheat. You consider the good news of suffering both growing together in God’s time. If you read only the parable you can wrestle with these existential questions.

But once you get finished reading the explanation, you are tempted to stop wondering, pondering, considering and wrestling in favour of judging. You may begin to feel smugly satisfied to know that all those annoying, “weedy” folks will get their comeuppance in the end. Suddenly you start to wonder less what it means to be wheat in the midst of weeds and start to focus more on that coming day when the roll is called up yonder and the weeds get burned at long last.

We need to be cautious about not missing the impact of the parable in favour of the allegorical explanation provided. The parable is mostly about the *field* and the good news about how we are to live right now – not so much about the weeds. At its heart, the parable is about patience – persevering when faced with difficulties – suffering with – how the wheat reacts in the days that lead to harvest.

To help me wrestle with the second part of our reading from Matthew for today I am reminded that when my interpretation of scripture is not consistent with my life experience of God’s love, then I do not understand what God wants to say to me through that passage. I am compelled to look for good news and called upon to proclaim it. So, what I recognize is that we are all wheat and weeds together – the kingdom of God is within us. God suffers both together and so must we. In so doing our goodness is not sacrificed to our darker selves and we are not taking a chance on routing out potential wheat in our zeal for weeds. God is in charge and I am not – thanks be to God.

*Let anyone with ears listen!* And may we hear God’s good news for us all. **Amen**

† Prayer

We give thanks to you, O God...

~ for the whole creation and that you, O God, from earliest days spoke and called us into faith and service ~ that you have come to us uniquely in Christ Jesus, bearing our sins and healing our brokenness ~ that we belong to a community of faith where Christ lives on in love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We give thanks to you...

~ for the love you have put in our hearts to pray for one another. Please hear our prayers, correct their errors, and bless all that is wise and loving.

We pray for the young and the strong, and all who are full of joy and high hopes. We pray for the elderly, the weak, and all who are utterly weary or disheartened today.

We pray for the wise and the generous, and those who are looking for new challenges. We pray for the foolish and the selfish, and those who evade their responsibilities.

We pray for peacekeepers and peacemakers – for all who work for justice in the world. We pray for the hostile and the treacherous, and all who will resort to violence today.

We pray for the well housed and well fed, and those who share their good fortune. We pray for the home insecure and the hungry – for all whose plight is ignored today.

We pray for the patient, the merciful, and all who will make new friends today. We pray for the hasty and the judgmental, and those who will create misery in their wake.

We pray for the healthy and the buoyant, and those who share their joy. We pray for the dying and the sad, and those who weep inconsolably.

We pray for our loved ones and our friends, and all those whom we will meet today. We pray for strangers and enemies, and those who think evil of us.

Loving God, please bring the day nearer when our prayers and our deeds will work in perfect harmony – when we will be a blessing to all whose lives touch our own. In Jesus' name we pray with our voices united...

***Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.  
With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and for ever. Amen***

➤ ***The kingdom of God is justice and joy*** **787**

Blessing

May the sowing of good seed lead to the growing of sturdy belief. Allow the Word to sink in, the Spirit to nourish, the Christ to tend. And may faith flourish as you continue in the grace of the living Lord, the love of God and as the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embraces us all. Amen

➤ ***May the God of hope go with us every day*** **726**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew*, Barbara Brown Taylor, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2004, pages 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> *The Parables of the Kingdom*, Robert Farrar Capon, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985, pages 101-102.

<sup>3</sup> Capon, page 130.