

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Lec. 16 – Proper 11 – July 19, 2026

Gen. 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-11, 22-33; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

New Song Episcopal Church – Coralville, IA

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Earlier this spring, when the earth turned from brown to an eye-popping array of green, many of us migrated outdoors to flower beds and gardens.

With joy, we embarked on the annual tradition of planting anew and tending to old friends just awakening from their long winter's sleep.

With the ample rain, a healthy crop of weeds also appeared along with the plants that we were expecting to see.

As a novice gardener, I now am adept at pulling out Creeping Charley, crab grass, unwanted violets, and new saplings. However, sometimes it's not so easy to discern what is a weed and what is not. I have noticed how intelligent these plants truly are. A weed often will grow right next to a plant with similar shaped leaves and form. It does its best to blend in, to fool me into thinking that it's supposed to be there. Sometimes it's only much later, after I thought the weeding was completely done, that I discover in the patch of bee balm a plant that has no business being there.

The other thing I've learned is that it's best to consult with the expert gardener on whether it's a weed **before** pulling it out rather than after the fact.

In a story that Jesus tells, weeds have been planted in a field. An enemy has done this and action must be taken. You can hear the urgency in the slaves' voices as they inform their master of this terrible thing, this treachery, inflicted upon his crop. The slaves want to fix it **now**. Rip out the weeds. Get rid of them so that the wheat can flourish. There's only one problem with this strategy. The weed, in question, is the bearded darnel.

This weed, common to Galilee, often grows alongside wheat. But, as it grows, it wraps its root tendrils around the **wheat's** root system. Therefore, if one pulls out the bearded darnel, one runs the risk of uprooting the young wheat plant as well. If this does not make the prospect of weed removal tricky enough, the bearded darnel, in its immature stages, looks remarkably like a wheat plant. It is only at the time of harvest that it's exposed as 'false wheat.'

At the end of its growth cycle, the ears of the bearded darnel continue to stand straight up since they are light weight-wise whereas the wheat bends under the weight of its much heavier ears.

With all this in mind, the master urges the slaves to do what they **do not** want to do. Wait. Exercise patience and caution.

Allow the weeds and wheat to grow together until the harvest.

Then, the reapers can collect the weeds, successfully separating them from the wheat, and burn them in the fire.

In this part of Matthew, Jesus utilizes agrarian stories to describe what the kingdom of God is like to his followers. In doing so, he also gives us a window into the difficult reality he faced in his ministry. Jesus tells us that the kingdom is like a sower who went out to sow, but not all the seed he planted flourished and produced a harvest. Some seed fell on rocky soil and withered.

Others fell on the path and were eaten by birds.

Other seed was choked out by thorns.

As Jesus travels through Galilee announcing that people should repent for the kingdom of God is at hand, his message is not being universally accepted.

On the contrary, he's often met with disbelief or outright resistance particularly from the Jewish establishment. The Pharisees bicker with Jesus about breaking Sabbath laws. They even go so far as to claim that his power to heal comes from Beelzebub, the prince of darkness. In exasperation, Jesus reproaches the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their lack of belief. He declares that in the day of judgment God will look more favorably on Sodom with its evil than God will view them for their rejection of his message.

So, what are Jesus' disciples to do when they face opposition?

Should they write off those that disagree with them? Should they call a weed, a weed? Should they uproot it before it has the chance to spread throughout the field, infiltrating the entire crop?

Jesus says, "Not so fast." Their hasty removal of the weed may damage other plants, causing more harm than good.

Plus, how can they be entirely sure that what they see before them is truly a weed? Already, the disciples' track record shows that they have some issues with this. On one occasion, the disciples refuse to let little children come to Jesus. In response, Jesus corrects them by saying that it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

When it comes to us as disciples of Jesus, how adept are we at correctly identifying weed or wheat? How quick are we to make snap judgments about others? We often do it automatically

forming our own internal algorithms to distinguish weed from wheat.

"Well, he has a NRA decal on his truck and that's all you need to know."

"She reads Heather Cox Richardson. He flies a Pride flag at his house and that's all you need to know." "She watches Fox News.

He's evangelical and that's all you need to know." It's so easy to reduce others to a soundbite, ignoring the fullness of who they are.

One could argue that the delineations between good and evil in this parable, between being righteous and being cast in a furnace of fire, are a bit too stark.

After all, aren't we and the choices that we make far more nuanced than that?

On one level, aren't we all a mixture of the good and the bad, wheat & weed?

Plus, when it comes to life in the field these days, things seem to have reached a tipping point and a very distressing one at that. Every day in the news we hear of wildfires, extreme heat, and floods as our planet careens towards climate change. We witness runaway capitalism with its greed, corruption, and exploitation of the poor. We watch the destruction and dismantling of our institutions. We listen to the beating of war drums as people are reclassified as friend or enemy, us versus them.

All the while, the poor and vulnerable suffer even more.

Our entire field seems to be overrun by weeds.

As an act of resistance, we silo ourselves with those who think like we do.

We fortify our positions often demonizing those who see things differently. And we try our best to deny the painful truth of where our society is in its life cycle.

We are past the apex of our growth and now have entered a time of decline.

So, what are we to do? Should we run into the field and begin pulling weed after weed as fast as we can? Can we root out problems like these?

The moment feels urgent and yet, the master in Jesus' parable recommends no hasty removal of the weeds. We are encouraged to do the very thing we **do not** want to do. We are told to wait.

Several weeks ago, an online conversation took place between Ilia Delio and Cynthia Bourgeault; in my mind, two of the great theologians of our time.

Ilia Delio, a scientist and Franciscan Sister; Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest and contemplative. Both of them heavily influenced by the mystical tradition of the Church and by the evolutionary work of Teilhard de Chardin.

They were in dialogue discussing the Cosmos, the Chaos of our Times, and the Complexities of Consciousness. In their conversation, they had several key insights worth sharing.

Both Ilia and Cynthia agree that the crises that we have in our world today will not be solved through logic, technological breakthroughs, & ever greater efficiencies.

What we face is beyond the limits of what our rational, mental state of consciousness can achieve. In fact, things turning nihilistic, as they are, is a reflection of the lower level of consciousness at which we currently are operating. Where our world is locked in dualistic thinking, polarized by conflicts of either/or, black and white, winners and losers; all of this will lead to further disintegration.

Everything appears to be collapsing. It looks inevitable at this point.

As counter-intuitive as it may seem, perhaps this collapse is necessary.

Perhaps our old way of life, of seeing ourselves as separate, discreet individuals in competition with one another must fall completely apart in order to make room for a new way of being.

However, this collapse, this colossal amount of change, is sheer agony to endure.

Anguish and longing are inherent to this process. The image that Cynthia Bourgeault offers us for this moment is Mary the Pieta; the statue of Mary, the mother of our Lord, holding the lifeless body of her son in her lap.

Mary holds him in love, fully present to the pain of his suffering and death and yet not dissolving into despair. She holds him and she holds on to love trusting that God holds both her and her son.

In the same way, we are invited to join Mary in holding our world in its collapse and incredible pain. We are to hold it in love.

We are to hold our world and wait

in the ambiguity and discomfort of an unknown future.

We hold the world while trusting that the God of love is making things new.

In this holding and waiting, we are not meant to be passive bystanders.

We have an essential part to play. As plants in the field of life, our roots are intertwined, entangled with the roots of others. Rather than this being problematic; in this case, it is pure gift. Therefore, what we think, what we say, what we do, what we pray all matters. Ilia and Cynthia remind us that no conscious action is ever wasted. Our spiritual lives are never really private.

Instead, what we do impacts all the other plants, enriching the whole.

We have the capacity to bring light, goodness, and love to our collective world, improving the health of the entire field. As we participate in this work of holding our world with loving attention, God slowly is shifting us and our world into a new way of being. We are growing in love.

We are growing in collective consciousness.

Over time, our mindset shifts from solely being concerned about my life, to asking how I might serve life as a whole.

We may not see this seismic shift completed in our lifetime. Likely, it will be generations in the making. And yet, our role of waiting and holding the world with loving attention is key to this new way of being, this new consciousness and love emerging. Cynthia Bourgeault describes it in this way:

“What I do know in my Teilhardian faith is that whether I am seeding things in the ground [to flourish] in ten years or in ten million years that my work of living as a conscious human being, to the highest and fullest that I can actualize it, will not go to waste.

And with that, I just give my life into the future...

I just live the best shot of what it means to be a human being

and know that the divine intelligence is purposeful and slow  
and the arc of evolution does indeed bend toward consciousness and love.”

Dear friends, watching as the weeds overrun the field,  
watching the collapse of much we hold dear,  
know that we are held in love.

May we trust that God is at work through our every thought, word,  
deed, and prayer to spread light and goodness in this world.

The shift slowly is underway.

May we hold our world tenderly and be sustained as we wait.