

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2026
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel reading: Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Let us pray: Search me, O God and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts. Look well whether there be any wickedness in me and lead me in the way that is everlasting. Amen.

Today's parable of the good seed and the bad seed, evil vs good, and the unexpected events in life reminds me of an ancient Chinese text written around 139 BCE. It goes something like this:

"Once upon a time there was a farmer who lost a horse. It ran away. His neighbors came that evening and said, "That's unfortunate." And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the horse returned and brought with it seven wild horses. The neighbors came back and said, "That's great, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses when he was thrown and broke his leg. Again, the neighbors came to the farmer and said, "Well, that's too bad, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day army enlistment officers came looking for people for the army but they rejected the farmer's son because he had a broken leg. The neighbors came around that evening and said, "Isn't that wonderful?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

In our gospel parable, we encounter a sower who planted good seeds in his farm.

The Sower is the Master, representing Jesus Christ. During the night an enemy came to sabotage his field by scattering bad seeds. When he was told by his slaves

what had occurred, to the surprise of the slaves, the Master decides to keep both types of seeds together until they mature. Why would Jesus want both to temporarily co-exist?

The Bible includes many paradoxes just like this one in today's story to describe our journey of faith. Whenever Jesus uses a paradox, he is asking us to hold two seemingly contradictory truths in uncomfortable tension. The parable tells us that the good seed are the children of the kingdom, while the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.

Although today, we don't often speak about a "devil or evil," yet here, Jesus clearly says evil exists, it is real, insidious, intentional, and dangerous. The evil done in this parable was intentionally done out of malice by an enemy. These weeds are not harmless, they are poisonous and life threatening.

Many of us may agree that there is evil in the world, and we can name what evil has been done to others, but we often neglect to realize that we may also be the cause of evil to others. Today's Epistle reminds us that we live both in the flesh and in the Spirit. We contain both wheat and weed in us, good and evil, fruitfulness and destruction. We are, in Martin Luther's famous words, "the same time both sinner and saint."

In our household, Edward tends to our garden. Sometimes he's not sure which are the weeds and which are the new ground cover that is sprouting up. And maybe that's the point Jesus is making. We often don't know. It's sometimes difficult to distinguish the wheat from the weeds, whether they are in the garden of our back yard or the garden of our life.

So this uncertainty is where our Chinese text intersect with our parable. Because we don't have all the answers in life, we need to leave room for the Maybes. Just "maybe," we have yet to discover the whole truth. Maybe we need an open mind to discern our classification of good seeds and bad seeds. When you look back on your life have you ever been wrong about which was which? Have you ever thought you were right about an issue, only to later discover by the grace of God, that you were wrong? Maybe happens when we allow the good seeds **in us** to grow up and establish strong roots. In fact, they need a lifetime to establish.

If you noticed in the our parable, there is a growing process of a seed. Jesus says, "When the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. When the seeds start to mature, then it is very clear which are the wheat and which are the weeds. The same thing happens when we mature in Christ, we can see more

clearly what is true and what is fake. Just maybe, we are still discovering ourselves.

I recently saw a T-shirt that read, “Permanently under construction.” It’s true, all of us are going through construction as God’s children, and that’s why it’s important to have daily prayer, daily meditation, and daily service to God. These are the nutrients that feed our souls and produce good seeds.

I wish that life was as simple as weeds or wheat. But it’s not. I wish it was as easy as getting on our knees and pulling some weeds. But it’s not. Until the harvest, we have wheat and weeds growing together in the garden of our life in which our roots have become intertwined and complicated.

In our modern society, we tend to want definitive answers to what are wheat and what are weeds. Hence, we begin to categorize and judge other people. Pay attention to the rhetoric of our politicians, read the posts on social media, pay attention to your opinions and judgments of yourself and others. It’s usually either wheat or weeds. In those cases, we’re pretty darn sure which is which and that we are right. But, are we so sure? Do we have space to change our perception? Room for a maybe?

That's what the workers are doing in today's parable. They want to pull some weeds. They are sure they can tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds. But their roots have become intertwined. You **can't** really tell the difference **until** both plants mature. We are like the servants. When we see evil in the world, it is easy for us to be what one Bible commentator calls a "moral gardener." We say to ourselves, let me decide who is good, and who is bad. Who belongs to God, and who doesn't." Who can get into heaven and who can't. Who has the correct interpretation of scripture and who doesn't. But Jesus says, "Let both of them grow together," Why? Because there's a chance that you'll be surprised. As Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor puts it, "Turn us loose with a machete and there is no telling what we will chop down and what we will spare." The business of holy discernment is much harder than we think. When we are self-righteous, our love tends to deteriorate into judgment...Our holiness devolves into hypocrisy...And the whole field suffers.

The Master knows that with maturity the workers will see the difference between the wheat and the weeds. And I'm not talking about the maturity of the plants only. I'm also talking about the maturity of the workers, your maturity and my maturity. Haven't there been times when you said or thought, "I wish I knew then what I know now"? With maturity our sight changes. We have the benefit of more experience, a deeper understanding, and greater wisdom. And often times our

seeing changes because God showed us what mercy looks like. This happens only when we are open minded, only when we leave space for Jesus' "maybe."

You know the t-shirt I mentioned earlier? "Permanently under construction."

There's another one that says, " Under Construction, God is not done with me yet."

Just maybe, God has something more for me to learn.

Our task is to lovingly tend to the field, to grow the good, not burn the bad. Our job is to bless the field, not curse it. Remember, the field ultimately belongs to God. Only God knows the field intimately enough to tend it. Only God loves the field enough to bring it safely to harvest.

In this parable, Jesus asks us to wait. Waiting for God is sometime hard. Waiting for the harvest requires patience when we live in a paradox of good and evil. So what would it be like and what would it take to live more in the maybe of life than in the clear cut separation of wheat and weeds? Do you allow God space to show you the possibilities that comes with maybe? What if maybe is what holds the door open for grace?

Maybe keeps us from claiming to know more than we really do or can know. It asks us to be willing to be surprised and live with curiosity. It allows time for

growth, change, and new possibilities. Maybe keeps our hearts soft and our eyes open. Maybes require us to trust the Master.

I wonder what's growing in the garden of your life today— all the things that look like wheat, all the things that look like weeds, all the things you are unclear about — what's the maybe for you? Where **in** your life do you need to keep your heart's door wide open. Are there people you dislike, maybe the homeless, a political enemy, or transgender people. Jesus is asking you to keep that door open for mercy and to know where might you need to give space for God to do some gardening. Amen.