



Pentecost 8 A (Proper 11)

July 19, 2026

[RCL]: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23 or Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 or Isaiah 44:6-8; Psalm 86:11-17; Romans 8:12-25; **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

Opening Prayer |

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Context |

The author of the Gospel of Matthew uses parables to deepen the faith of Jesus' followers. Familiar examples—imagery drawn from agriculture and household tasks, like growing wheat and baking bread—are recounted in unexpected ways to reveal the contrast between the systems of the world and the kingdom of God. Parables are not intended to be strict directives for what to do or not to do. Rather they are invitations to encounter God in surprising, yet familiar, ways. The season of ordinary time, the long stretch between the festivals of Pentecost and Advent, offers the opportunity to encounter God in new and surprising ways by approaching familiar practices with curiosity and openness.

The parable of the weeds and the wheat employs master/slave language that many contemporary readers might find troubling. Responsible engagement with Scripture acknowledges this difficulty rather than ignoring it. Some individuals and groups may find it meaningful to discuss the issue directly, naming the ways biblical passages that use this language have been misused to justify oppression and dehumanization. The first discussion question below is an attempt to initiate such a discussion. Others may find alternate translations, such as “landowner” and “laborers,” make the parable more accessible. Still others may find that the harm caused by the weaponization of these texts creates a barrier that makes meaningful engagement with the parable a struggle.

All responses are valid. God extends invitations through a variety of experiences, texts, individuals, and communities. Our authentic engagement with the texts of holy Scripture is a hallmark of the Christian life, even when that engagement is one of challenge.

Theological Reflection |

In unpacking this parable, let's think first about the meaning of weeds. A weed could be defined, very simply, as a plant out of place. Now, that's admittedly an innocuous definition for something that every gardener and farmer knows to be a persistent adversary. Weeds are not simply inconvenient; they demand time, labor, and resources and managing them can rival the care given to the crop itself. Before the first seed is sown, a wise grower has anticipated the weeds' arrival, because she knows that weeds are a certainty, not an anomaly. To ignore the reality of weeds is to jeopardize the harvest.

Weeds compete for the limited resources of space, water, nutrients, and sunlight. In contrast to cultivated plants, which often require careful tending, weeds are remarkably resilient: enduring drought, pushing through compacted soil, and flourishing in places where little else could survive. Their presence is costly and relentless, forcing the grower into a constant balancing act between attending to the crop while simultaneously managing the threat of what grows up alongside it.

With this reality in mind, the reaction of the slaves in Matthew's parable feels reasonable and responsible. Their instinct upon discovering the weeds is to remove them to protect the wheat crop. It seems to be what any diligent grower would do. But before they act, they consult the master, only to discover that their instincts are not the way in which this master operates this field. The kingdom of heaven does not operate according to the assumptions of human prudence. The parable, as parables often do, subverts expectations.

The master of the parable's field, even as the one who sowed the good seed, is untroubled by the slaves' report. Neither the presence of the weeds nor the actions of the enemy who sowed them provoke the master's urgency. The only danger to the crop lies in premature intervention by the slaves, who in their eagerness to protect the wheat, do not recognize the risk their actions pose. Instead, the wise master takes complete control of and responsibility over the wheat crop, proving to be a trustworthy, faithful steward at the harvest.

The logic of scarcity that governs ordinary agricultural fields is overturned by this parable. In this master's field, even though the surreptitiously planted weeds grow alongside the wheat, they do not ultimately deprive the wheat of what it needs to thrive nor do they threaten the integrity of the harvest. The Son of Man's field is characterized by sufficiency. This is a vision of an economy of limitless abundance, not scarcity and competition.

This parable reaches beyond our fields to the deeper, persistent problem of the presence of evil in the world. Like the weeds sown under the cover of darkness, evil appears as an unexplained, unwelcome, and sometimes unchecked intrusion—a threat to God's good

creation. Its presence raises the same difficult questions that the slaves had for the master: Why does God permit evil to persist? Does the presence of evil imply that God is weak, indifferent, or absent? Should not Christians be tasked with rooting out evil?

The parable's explanation reframes rather denies these questions. Jesus's disclosure of the disciples' identity in the parable is surprisingly humble. The disciples do not stand in as the master; nor even as the slaves. They are represented by the seeds sown in the field. Hearers and readers, too, are the good wheat seed: sown, sustained, and secured by the master. The parable's conclusion does not offer us permission to turn a blind eye to the presence of evil. Rather, it promises that the moment of judgment and separation must come in God's good time, at the completion of the harvest.

Discussion Questions |

- Acknowledging that the master/slave language of this parable can be problematic for many readers, note the attributes and actions of the master in the text. What does this passage reveal about power in the kingdom of God?
- Where around you do you find evidence of God's abundant sufficiency, even alongside the real presence of evil?
- How does this parable challenge you? Where does it invite you to broaden your tolerance for the "weeds" growing in the wheat of our and your world?

Faith in Practice |

This parable offers the gift of freedom in inviting us to resist the urge to "pull up weeds" in our lives and in our world. When you encounter a situation that triggers an impulse to judge, control, or correct, pause before acting and pray that God will grant you the wisdom to discern between what is your faithful action and what is God's responsibility.

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