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 Matthew 13:24-30
 Hudson
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SCRIPTURE:

He (Jesus) 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.'"

SERMON

Farming. Not me, not most of you. The closest most of us will ever get to being farmers is caring for our garden and yards. Now, I have never been what you might call a "lawn-care-fanatic." As a child, I cut my parents' grass, but I never liked it much.

In our last home we had a neighbor who spent countless hours perfecting his lawn, catching moles, fertilizing, aerating, trimming and edging. His yard was his pride. I, on the other hand, was always thankful when I could keep ours from looking like an unruly field.

Well, this spring I finally decided to take a stab at ridding my yard of bare spots, crabgrass and those dreaded dandelions. So I make a little trip down to Ace Hardware to get one of those spreaders for fertilizer and a bit of advice on how to get started. The man at Ace was very helpful. (Which of course he should be – since: *Ace is the place with the helpful hardware man.*) He told me I need to put down more grass seed. So I read the label on the bag of seed . . . and it says it has weeds in it. Weeds in it . . . but that's what I'm trying to get rid of. So the man reassures me there is no way to plant grass without some weeds being in the mix.

Imagine that. Here I am trying to plant a nice green weed-free lawn . . . and lo-and-behold, I find the seed itself is filled with the dreaded weeds. How unfair is that! Fine, I thought. And I went at it back in April, and today my lawn may not be the best in the neighborhood, but it's the greenest it's ever been.

And you know what, that's a little like us. We may want to be around really good people – even want to be good ones ourselves – but it seems everywhere we look, there's a lot of weed in the bag, too.

Put that thought on hold for a minute and look at our lesson again:

In Jesus' parable about the wheat and the weeds, we find the workers of the farm wanting to know if they should go out and pull the weeds from the farmer's wheat field. It sounds like a good idea. Clear the weeds away and give the wheat room to thrive. Nice idea, but a bad one. Two problems:

1. Wheat is grown by "broadcast" planting. It's not like corn or soybeans that are planted in neat little rows. Wheat is like grass. It's chucked everywhere in the field. If weeds are mixed in, you can't pull them out without ripping out the wheat, too.
2. The wheat and the weeds look a lot alike. Again, if you go for the weeds, you're just as likely to kill the wheat by mistake.

So what happens? The master tells the workers to let the wheat and weeds grow side by side and that he'd sort it all out later. He says he'll gather the wheat and he'll burn the weeds. And this is what Jesus says the kingdom of God is like. He says, that's what our world is like. Wheat and weeds together. Thank goodness for that!

We don't have to sort it out.
We don't have to judge who's good and who's bad.
We're off the hook.

He says, Don't think you need to pull out the weeds in your midst. God will do it later.

Nice message. I think. Well, sort of. This passage is too easily interpreted as saying there are people who are the good wheat of the world. And conversely – there are those who are nothing more than a bunch of ugly poisonous weeds. And I guess if you read this passage in isolation, that's the message you would need to take away. But this passage doesn't stand all by itself. And read in the context of the whole of the gospel, you don't find Jesus writing people off as some being good and some inherently bad.

No, there's a mix of good and bad in us all. For me, that's a much more compelling and faithful reading of this passage. There's weed and wheat in each of us. We should be about the business of making the wheat thrive within each one. And even more, not destroying the whole crop by trying to kill off those burdensome weeds.

Most of you know that I don't title sermons, but if I did, I might make this one "Finding the wheat in everyone and everything." Why? Because I think that's what Jesus is calling us to do in this parable.

The world can be so cynical. So negative. So fatalistic. Not Jesus. And neither should we be. Jesus calls us to find hope in the most hopeless. To find promise in the lost. To believe in what seems impossible. Jesus calls us to find the wheat in the midst of the field of weeds. Why? Because it's there. And a lot of what we think is weed is nothing other than wheat in hiding. Where might we find that wheat in hiding? Sometimes it's in the hopeless cause right in front of us.

I remember Craig, a boy in my last church who was nothing but trouble. I remember one day having a group of kids come running to find me saying that Craig was hanging off the edge of the balcony telling them he was going to jump. I remember Craig scaring the other kids by playing chicken with a pocket knife he'd throw between his own feet. And I remember Craig always playing with fire. I was forever afraid he'd burn down the church. Some of the parents said Craig was no good, a bad apple, a problem child and he should be kept away from the other kids. But Craig – the bad weed – stayed around. And by the time Craig was twenty-two, that bad weed who played with fire had honorably served in the navy and become a fireman filled with safety tips for the church – a real watchdog for the good welfare of the community. A weed needing to be plucked? Or maybe wheat in hiding, needing nurture, care, and someone to believe in him?

Where might we find that wheat in hiding? Sometimes it's in the person vilified by the world. Do you remember the story of Chuck Colson? He was seen as the pariah of the Nixon administration – the feared hatchet man at the center of Watergate who was described in the media as being incapable of humanitarian thought. Colson was a political weed if there ever was one. Pull him out and lock him away. A funny thing happened, though. In his short term in prison the weed withered away and died and a great crop of wheat emerged. Colson came out of jail and started the Prison Fellowship, the world's largest prison ministry and he has dedicated his life to ministering to the imprisoned ever since.

Which was and is Colson? Wheat or weed?

The world can be so cynical saying nothing ever changes . . . especially people. We say no. We say there is wheat to be found within everyone. There is hope to be found in every moment.

Where might we find that wheat in hiding? Sometimes it's right inside ourselves in those moments when the world around us tells us we're not worth anything. I got into a lot of trouble back in elementary school. My grades always came in just fine, but I guess I was a real nuisance for my teachers. And, I have to say, none of them did much to make me believe in myself. But I did become friends with the school janitor, an Italian immigrant. His uniform said his name was Ralph . . . only later would I learn that his real name was Faliero. Well, Ralph (or Faliero) would tell me that I would change the world. He said, "You're going to be president some day." What to my teachers was a weed was wheat to him. And more than any of my teachers, Faliero/Ralph is the one who made me believe in myself. The world tells those who fail, those who get into trouble, that they are lost causes. The world gives up on people. Not us. We say there is always another chance and that everyone and everything has hope for redemption.

Where might we find that wheat in hiding? Sometimes it's right there to be found and only needs a little help and encouragement from us . . . sometimes in the simplest of ways. It doesn't always take much and sometimes we don't even know we're bringing out the wheat – but the effort makes a difference.

Last week, one of you told me about going to your 50th high school reunion. And how a girl came up to you and said, “You don’t remember me. But I remember you . . . every day I think about what you did back in high school.” All I could think was that you were going to tell me how she would always remember the way you tripped her back in high school. But that wasn’t what she said at all. She said, “Nobody liked me back then. Nobody was ever nice to me. But you. Every time you saw me, you gave the nicest most sincere smile. And I’ve never forgotten it.” Just a smile – imagine that. Sometimes we just need someone to believe in us in the most simple of ways, and the wheat will prevail over the weeds. The world can be so very cynical, finding fault in everything and everyone. Not us . . . we believe in the possible.

The world finds reasons why efforts will fail and why people will disappoint. Not us . . . our faith tells us (though we may not always get what we hope for) with God anything is possible.

The world says that the weeds will always choke out the wheat.

Not us. We believe and live into the future where God always has the last word. And the wheat and the good within each of us and everything can and will overcome.