

9/27/26 Growing Together in the Kingdom *Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43*
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The Germans thought they knew exactly who **Juan Pujol García** was. During World War Two, García convinced German intelligence to recruit him, by pretending to be a fanatical pro-Nazi Spanish official. However, he was the exact opposite. García was a double agent, who built a fake spy network funded by German intelligence. He moved to Lisbon, where he invented reports – using public guidebooks, reference books, magazines, and his own imagination. He convinced his German handlers that he managed more than two dozen sub-agents across Britain, all while collecting money to support his supposedly extensive network. He even secured a pension for the fictional widow of one of his agents after reporting that the agent had “died”.

García contacted British intelligence, and was brought to London, in April of 1942. Working with British intelligence, he continued feeding the Germans a massive stream of misinformation. He played a role in the Allied deception campaign known as Operation Fortitude, helping convince the Germans that the D-Day landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, were a diversion, and that the main invasion would come at Pas-de-Calais. The deception helped keep substantial German forces in the Pas-de-Calais area, giving the Allies additional time to establish their beachhead.

Incredibly, García was **decorated by both sides**. On July 29, 1944, he was informed that Adolf Hitler had awarded him the Iron Cross, Second Class, for his service to Germany. Later that year, in December, he received a Member of the Order of the British Empire, an MBE, for his service to Britain.

After the war, to protect him from possible Nazi retaliation, a false story was circulated that he had died of malaria in Angola. García then lived in Venezuela, under a new identity, and in relative anonymity, for decades. His survival was eventually revealed publicly, and he died in Caracas, in 1988. The Germans were certain García was one of them. They believed his reports, trusted his information, and decorated him with the Iron Cross. **But he wasn't their spy. He was Britain's spy.**

Sometimes, I think that's how we view other people.

We look at what we can see, and quickly decide, “*I know what that person is.*” We do it almost automatically. Good person. Bad person. Trustworthy. Dangerous. Genuine.

Fake. One of us. One of them. One of those. Sometimes our judgments may be accurate. But sometimes, like German intelligence with García, we can be spectacularly wrong. This is **the danger of premature certainty**.

Jesus tells a story about servants who are certain they know which plants are wheat and which are weeds. But the master tells them, *“Let both grow until the harvest.”* Perhaps, part of what Jesus is teaching us, is that we’re not nearly as good at making final judgments about people as we think we are.

Listen to 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.”*” (Matthew 13:24-30).

“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!”** (Matthew 13:36-43).

One of the issues that preoccupies many spiritual or religious people is this:

“Who’s in and who’s out? Who’s good and who’s bad? Who’s blessed and who isn’t? Who’s going to make it in the end and who won’t?”

John the Baptist said that the Messiah would (*Matthew 3:12*), ***“gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”***

Religious people who were watching Jesus were disturbed by the fact that Jesus wasn’t doing what they expected the Messiah to do. Jesus wasn’t separating people into neat categories of worthy and unworthy. In fact, Jesus was gathering around himself and attracting people who didn’t know or practice God’s law, and who, in the eyes of many religious people, didn’t have a religious or moral leg to stand on before a holy God. To religious people who thought of themselves as **wheat**, Jesus was surrounded by people they regarded as **weeds**.

Then, as now, people can be eager for Jesus to sift the wheat from the weeds. If we’re honest, many of us feel this way, at times. It can be easy to look forward to **other people** getting what is coming **to them** for **their sins**. We want God to sort things out. We want God to identify the bad people. We want God to separate them from us. And we want God to make sure they get what they deserve.

In the parable, the trouble begins with an enemy who comes under the cover of darkness, sows weeds among the wheat, and then goes away. When the weeds appear among the wheat, the servants question the farmer: *“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?”* The farmer answers, *“An enemy has done this.”*

The servants want to act. They want to deal with the problem. They want to go into the field and pull up the weeds. And notice the confidence in their question: *“Do you want us to go and gather them?”* In other words, *“We know what the weeds are. We know what needs to be done. Give us permission, and we’ll take care of it.”*

But the farmer says: ***“No. Let both of them grow together until the harvest.”*** If you know anything about gardening or farming, this sounds like no way to run a farm. Two bad things happen if you never weed a garden or field. The weeds can choke out the plants you want, as Jesus described in the parable of the Sower we heard two weeks ago. And you can end up with a bumper crop of weed seeds to plague the next season’s planting.

Based on the parables of the Sower and the Weeds in the Wheat, it's possible that Jesus was a better carpenter than he was a farmer! Obviously, he's not trying to give us a comprehensive guide to agricultural practice. He's making a spiritual point.

The field is the world. And Jesus is telling us that God's kingdom is growing in a world where good and evil are present together. We're reminded of the presence of evil every week. However, there's a final separation coming. But **that final separation belongs to God.** That distinction is important.

Jesus isn't telling us to abandon moral discernment. He isn't telling us to ignore evil, excuse wrongdoing, or pretend that harmful behavior doesn't matter. Elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus tells his followers to recognize false prophets by their fruits. He teaches his disciples to confront wrongdoing within the faith community. Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to seek justice, protect the vulnerable, and resist evil.

Jesus is also saying – **don't confuse your limited judgment with God's final judgment.** Don't assume that you can see into another person's heart. Don't assume you understand the whole story. And don't appoint yourself as the one who has the authority to make the final separation between the righteous and the wicked.

The weeds – or tares, traditionally understood as darnel – could resemble wheat, especially in their early stages. That makes the image in the parable particularly effective. The problem isn't that the servants don't care enough to distinguish wheat from weeds. The problem is that they may be **too confident that they can.** They see something they believe is a weed and say, *"I know what that is."* And Jesus says, in effect, *"Be careful. You don't know as much as you think you know."*

That's a word we need to hear. Because we're very good at sorting people. We sort people religiously. We sort people politically. We sort people socially. We sort people by class, race, education, neighborhood, denomination, theology, personality, and a hundred other things. We sort people into *us* and *them*. And once we've decided who the weeds are, we can become remarkably comfortable with whatever happens to them.

The disciples don't understand the parable. They ask Jesus: *"Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."* Notice how they frame the question.

They want an explanation of the weeds. Perhaps they're thinking, *"What's the story with all this evil around us? When are you going to deal with all these evil people?"*

But Jesus' explanation shifts our attention. Yes, Jesus tells us there is evil in the world. Yes, Jesus tells us there will ultimately be judgment. But the judgment belongs to **God**, and the harvest belongs to **the end of the age**. The issue for us followers of Jesus is not: *"How can I identify every weed?"* The issue is: **"How should I live in the presence of evil?"**

And the question becomes: **whose methods are you going to use in dealing with the problem of evil — your methods or the methods of Jesus?**

Jesus' response is not vengeance. Jesus' response is not retaliation. Jesus' response is not permission for his followers to appoint themselves God's final judges.

Jesus says: *"**Let** both of them grow together until the harvest."*

The Greek word translated *"let"* (**aphiēmi**), is a word that can mean "leave," "let go," "release," and in other contexts, "forgive." The same Greek verb appears in the language of forgiveness elsewhere in the New Testament. We shouldn't press that word study too far — the word means different things in different contexts — but the connection is suggestive.

Jesus' teaching, here, resonates with his broader call to release our desire for vengeance, and to forgive those who wrong us. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray: *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* Jesus repeatedly calls his followers away from retaliation. One of the challenging aspects of this parable is that Jesus doesn't authorize his servants to respond to evil by trying to destroy the people they identify as evil.

Jesus is warning his followers: don't appoint yourself as God's final judge, and don't allow your anger to turn you into an agent of destruction.

I want to be very clear about what this does not mean. It doesn't mean we do nothing if a person is being abused, harmed, or is in danger. Of course we intervene appropriately. It doesn't mean we ignore injustice. It doesn't mean we excuse destructive behavior. It doesn't mean that forgiveness requires us to remain in an unsafe situation. It doesn't mean that protecting someone from harm is the same thing as vengeance. **Patience is not passivity. Forgiveness isn't the same as excusing evil.**

Jesus is calling us away from the desire to punish, destroy, or get even — to leave ultimate judgment in God’s hands, while we faithfully do what love, justice, and mercy require of us in the present.

This is difficult for us to hear because we often think our anger is what gives us the strength to confront evil. But anger can become something else. When we feel hurt, attacked, or wronged, our pride gets involved. We nurse anger. We stew. We fret. We withdraw. We hold back. We rant. We tell several other people. We replay the offense in our minds. And eventually, we begin directing our negative energy toward the person who hurt us — or sometimes, toward people who had nothing to do with it. We go striding into the field, ripping up weeds, and trampling wheat in the process. When we’ve finished, we turn around and see the mess we’ve made, and sometimes the field looks worse than it did before. Maybe that’s part of what Jesus is warning us about.

In our determination to eliminate evil, we can become destructive, ourselves. The enemy sows the weeds. And then our anger can tempt us to do the rest. But the kingdom of God continues to grow. The wheat continues to grow. The work of God continues. Even when the field is complicated. Even when good and evil are mixed together. Even when we can’t make sense of what we’re seeing. Even when we desperately want God to sort everything out right now.

The wheat and the weeds, in Jesus’ parable, are difficult to distinguish. And that should make us humble. Because good and evil do not simply exist in two perfectly separate groups of human beings. We know this from our own lives. Every one of us knows what it’s like to do something loving and something selfish. Every one of us knows what it’s like to act courageously and cowardly. Every one of us has moments when we’re generous and moments when we’re resentful. Every one of us has sinned. Every one of us needs grace.

So, if we spend all our energy identifying everybody else’s weeds, we may fail to notice what’s growing in the soil of our own soul. A poem puts it this way:

*A little seed lay on the ground,
And soon began to sprout.
Seeing all the flowers around
It wondered, “How shall I come out?”*

*The lily's face is fair and proud,
 But just a trifle cold.
 The rose, I think, is rather loud,
 And its fashion's getting old.
 Of the violet some may think well,
 But it's not a flower I'd choose;
 Nor even Canterbury bell,
 I've never cared for blues.
 And so it criticized each flower,
 This haughty little seed,
 Until it woke one summer morn,
 And found itself a weed!*

We can spend so much time judging what everyone else is, that we never ask what we are becoming. And that's where Jesus' parable brings us. **What are you becoming?**

God has fixed the final moment of separation. That time has not yet come. The harvest is God's work. **We're living in the season of growth.** Our task is not to spend our lives trying to identify every weed. **Our task is to grow.**

We want our profession of faith in Jesus Christ to produce a life of growing discipleship — a life that produces a bumper crop of love, justice, mercy, humility, patience, forgiveness, generosity, and faithfulness.

The opportunity for repentance has not yet run out. That means there is hope. Hope for the person we have judged and hope for us.

I don't want to spend my life criticizing other people, only to discover — too late — that I have neglected my own soul.

I don't want to be more interested in God removing the weeds than I am in God making me more like wheat.

We can be more comfortable asking God to remove the weeds than asking God to help us make the changes we need to make, so we become more like wheat. Perhaps the prayer we need is not: *"God, show me who the weeds*

are.” Perhaps it is: “God, show me what’s growing in me.” “God, make me more like Jesus.” “God, teach me patience.” “God, teach me mercy.” “God, help me forgive.” “God, help me confront evil without becoming evil myself.” “God, help me leave the final judgment where it belongs — with you.”

Until that final harvest day, our religious zeal needs to be tempered by humility. We must resist the temptation to turn our anger into destruction, while protecting those who are vulnerable, seeking justice, and confronting wrongdoing when necessary.

And we must refuse the temptation to make ourselves God's final judge. The field, the harvest, and the final separation all belong to God. **Our work is to grow.** Which leaves us with a final question: while God is patiently growing the kingdom of heaven, **what kind of person are you becoming?**

“Let anyone with ears listen!”

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. We’re often preoccupied with identifying “who’s in and who’s out.” Where do you see that tendency — in yourself, the church, or society? Why do we find it so tempting?
2. Jesus tells the servants, “Let both of them grow together until the harvest.” What do you think makes this command so difficult for us to practice?
3. Whose methods are you going to use in dealing with the problem of evil — your methods or those of Jesus? What does it look like to respond to someone who has wronged you, using Jesus’ methods rather than your own?
4. Is there a difference between forgiving someone and allowing harmful behavior to continue? How do we practice forgiveness while still responding appropriately when someone is being harmed?
5. Wheat and weeds can be difficult to distinguish — and good and evil can exist within the same person. How should that realization affect the way we judge other people, and the way we look at ourselves?
6. Ask yourself, “Is there someone I have been trying to pull up as a ‘weed’ whom Jesus may be asking me to leave in God’s hands — and what would forgiveness look like?”