

Together Now ... because God is **Merciful**

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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based on sermons by James Douthwaite and William Cwirla

Two weeks ago, we heard the Parable of the Sower, and about "Cultivating Faith". How graciously, how generously, how abundantly, how constantly God is casting out the seeds of faith into our world, into our lives, into our hearts, to produce fruit, followers of Jesus, who yield a harvest of faith and love. This week we hear that Jesus isn't the only farmer out there. He isn't the only one sowing seed. The devil is sowing seeds of doubt. Sowing seeds of unbelief. Sowing seeds of sin and evil in God's good world.

There's evil in the world. Anyone doubt that? It's all around us. It's in us. And a question many wonder, is "why?" Why doesn't God do something about all the evil in the world? Two answers are often given. One, is that God **doesn't care**. He doesn't care enough to do anything about evil. Or, God doesn't care enough about *you* to do anything about it. Either He is detached and uninterested, or you're too sinful, too unworthy, for Him to intervene. So obviously, He's not a God you can count on when the going gets tough. God just doesn't care.

A second answer to the question "Why doesn't God do anything about evil?" is that God **can't**. He wants to. He cares for you. But look at all that's happening! If God *could* do something about it, don't you think He *would*? So God is not as strong as you think. He's too weak to do anything about evil.

When things are going bad, when things are going wrong in our lives, in our world, we sometimes wonder whether God really cares about us and what's going on in our life, why He's not doing anything about it. Or we give the devil too much credit, thinking he's more powerful than he really is, that God is not strong enough to do anything about him. And that's exactly the way the devil wants it - for us to think too highly of him and too lowly of God.

But today in this parable, God gives us *His* answer to the "why?" question (Why doesn't God do something about evil in the world), an answer that's far different than those we so often hear. And quite surprising. And it's this: God allows the evil to stay. He doesn't pull up all the weeds of evil now, Jesus says, not because He is weak, not because He's uncaring. God allows evil to stay because He's **merciful**. *Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.* (Psalm 103:8)

You see, we think like the servants of the master in the parable. We want the weeds of evil pulled now and the garden, the world, to be pristine and pure, like it was in the beginning, before sin. So, weeds? Pull 'em out! Get rid of evil *now*. But there are a few problems with our thinking. The first, being the assumption that we actually know the *difference* between the good plants and the weeds, between belief and unbelief, between children of God and children of the evil one.

Sometimes, in our own gardens or around our own homes, some plants we think are weeds are really good plants, and some we think are good plants are really weeds. Sometimes, it's hard to tell which is which and we end up doing what? Pulling up the wrong plants. But God is **merciful**. No good plants will be pulled up. He'd rather let the weeds grow, than pull up the good plants. What to do with the evil, the weeds in our world? Pull 'em up and get rid of them! That's assuming we actually know the difference between the wheat and the weeds.

A second problem with pulling up the weeds of evil *now* is when the weeds and wheat are growing so closely together their roots get intertwined. And as Jesus says, uprooting the weeds would uproot the wheat. It would do more *harm* than good. Do you know any non-Christians, any who are not followers of Jesus, not sons or daughters of God? What would happen if they were pulled up right now - family, friends, neighbors, people you count on for help, for protection, for what you need? If they were pulled right now, what would that mean for you? **God is merciful**. No good plants will be hurt.

Another problem is that, while in the world, weeds cannot become wheat, the same is not true with God. How many of us are an example of that? We were born a weed, an unbeliever, by nature, but have been born again by the spirit of God and are now a good, fruitful plant, grafted into Christ, forgiven for our weedy ways. So pull the weeds now? No, **God is merciful**. No weeds will be given up on too soon.

God is merciful. Not wanting any to perish. Which is why Jesus was there telling parables. Which is why He is here today. That by His Word, that by His cross, that by His forgiveness, He continue to graft weeds into Himself, making good what was evil, and producing a harvest of faith and trust unto eternal life. (Douthwaite)

Ours are not the first evil days. There was plenty of evil in Jesus' day. If He had asked any of his disciples, they could have pointed out a dozen social problems that might have been eased by divine intervention: Poverty. Injustice. Prejudice. Prostitution. Oppression. Drunkenness. Drought. Disease. "Look at the world," they might have said to him. "It's full of evil. It's full of weeds. Surely, this isn't the way it's supposed to be!" And, surely, they would be right. But their way of dealing with those problems (and our way) is different from God's way.

As Jesus hung on the cross, it would be easy to believe that God's way had failed, that evil had triumphed, that the field of the world had been completely overcome by weeds, overcome by evil. But that's not at all what happened. In the apparent defeat of Jesus, evil was ultimately conquered.

The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What happens to the seed of evil and unbelief sown by the devil? It's ultimately destroyed. Notice, the weeds do no permanent damage to the Lord's harvest. In the end, Christ prevails. He is Lord of the harvest field, the Savior of the world. The seed that He sows ultimately bears the fruit of eternal life. And nothing, not even the devil, can deny the Lord of His harvest.

In the parable, one time period concerns the future. The other time period concerns the here and now. The present, includes what? Both good and evil, both Christ and the devil, both faith and unbelief - all mixed up together. Jesus sows the good seed of His faith-creating Word, and the devil is right there sowing doubt, despair, and disbelief. We can't weed out all of the evil in the world and get rid of it - no matter how hard we try. Even if we could, we'd end up doing more harm than good. Sin and evil will remain - until the harvest, until Jesus finally returns to earth.

The devil sows his seeds densely. Not just a weed here and there. But the weeds are thick, scattered across the entire field. The weeds are so thick, that the servants in the parable begin to question the owner of the field. "You did plant good seed, didn't you?" Focus on the weeds, and you'll lose sight of the wheat, and begin to *doubt* the Sower of the seed.

If we fix our attention on sin and evil, we'll begin to doubt God. If we focus on what's wrong with this world (including ourselves), we'll lose sight of the *One thing* that is *right* with this world - that God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.

Notice, that while the servants are preoccupied with the weeds, the farmer is preoccupied with what? The wheat, the harvest. His children. The Good News of Jesus, the Gospel, is not about the eradication of evil in our world, but the cultivation of faith and eternal life.

There's evil in the world. Why doesn't God do something about it? Doesn't He care enough to do anything about it? Is He not powerful enough to do anything? Jesus says, "Because God is **merciful**."

We, the church, are not given the task of eliminating sin from the world. But we are given the task of applying Jesus' death and resurrection to the lives of fellow sinners. Why does God tolerate the evil in the world? *"The Lord is ... patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9)

And so, we live now, even in the midst of suffering and trouble and evil, not in resignation. Not in despair. But with confidence. With joy. With anticipation. Our preoccupation should not be with weed whacking, but instead, we're to be consumed with the task given us in these last days: the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom! (Cwirila) In a world full of weeds, perhaps we might remember the words from the Apostle Paul, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21) Overcome evil with Jesus.