

Matthew 13:24-30

One of the most troubling questions that we ask is: “*Why is there evil in our world?*” Why would a madman strap a bomb to himself and blow up a bus or a subway car? This parable, that is our lesson for today, does not fully answer that question, but it does tell us that the wheat and the weeds, which represent goodness and evil in this parable, will coexist until the close of human history. Our battle with sin and evil is going to be a lifelong struggle. We will not quickly or completely eradicate the evil in our lives or in our world. This parable, therefore, **TEACHES PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE.**

I sometimes hear people say, “*Once I accepted Christ, sin wasn't a problem for me anymore.*” Well, if that describes your experience, I celebrate that victory with you, but that has not been my experience. Sin continues to be a problem. I still have weeds in my life – and I suspect you do to.

In describing the nature of sin, John Wesley, the father of Methodism, **LIKENED SIN TO A WEED.** He taught that within each of us are the roots of sin. Left untreated, sin grows and bears fruit. When we accept Christ into our lives, at that moment, we are **JUSTIFIED**, made right with God, and our Justification cuts off the head or the fruit of sin. In Wesley's theology, however, the root of sin remains, and it is through the process of **SANCTIFICATION**, sanctification being our journey toward personal holiness, that we poison the root of sin, thereby keeping it under control. **BUT IF WE STOP OUR GROWTH TOWARD PERSONAL HOLINESS, THE ROOT OF SIN AND EVIL BEGINS TO GROW AGAIN, AND WILL BEAR FRUIT AGAIN.** I think it is clear from Jesus' explanation of this parable in verses 36-43, that there will come a day when our struggle with evil will be ended. Ultimately sin has no victory in God's world or in God's

people, but until then, until the end of time, are we to do nothing to try to stop the growth of evil?

Some have interpreted this parable in that way. *“Don't fight against evil, or you might destroy that which is good in the process. God will take care of all of it in the end”* And admittedly, from verse 29, you may be able to understand that from this parable. But to think that, is to miss THE REAL POINT of what Jesus is saying to us. Every gardener knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds, and so does God. Within our individual lives are buried the roots of hatred, bigotry, envy, bitterness, lust, anger, greed, jealousy and more. Our concern this morning is not about the final judgment that Jesus describes, certainly that is Good News. But rather, how do we deal with those weeds – those moral letdowns, those times of ethical failure, bad judgment, sin – that keep us from being all that God has created us to be? God has created us in god's own image, to be like a beautiful garden. Do we just ignore the weeds? If you say *“YES, ignore them, it will eventually all work out,”* then tell me: *“What happens in your yard or in your garden when you ignore the weeds?”* It is not a pretty sight. How then, do we get rid of the weeds and become the beautiful garden Christ intends us to be? Let me suggest some steps.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO RECOGNIZE HOW WEEDS GROW. Weeds grow without any effort on our part. Weeds are easy to grow. But a beautiful garden is hard work. You may have heard this little poem about gardening that says; *“To cultivate a garden takes a lot of labor. I would rather live next door to a gardener, and cultivate my neighbor.”* A beautiful garden requires hard work and sweat. Growing weeds does not. Weeds just spring up!

Weeds remind me of that bit of philosophy so popular in our society today which says, *“If it feels good, do it!”* That is a recipe for certain failure. If we did only what felt good to us, we would be physical, mental, moral and spiritual wrecks. The things worth having in life are worth the effort. I've never heard an Olympic gold medalist say, *“No, it wasn't worth the time and*

training and effort I put into it!" Beware of anything that requires no commitment on your part. You are probably dealing with a weed. That is the sinister danger behind legalized gambling – it offers the illusion that great riches can be yours with little effort. It is also part of the psychology behind drugs and alcohol. Why face your problems? You can escape them with a drink or a pill. Weeds grow, without any effort.

But you begin to GET RID OF THE WEEDS by recognizing what it takes to grow a beautiful garden – *A VISION, A PLAN, AND A COMMITMENT TO CULTIVATE IT*. There are some people who take better care of their lawns than they do their lives. But the same basic principle is involved in both tasks. In order to have a beautiful lawn or garden, you begin with a mental idea of what you hope to achieve. You visualize the finished product. You smell the roses, you see the begonias, you visualize the springtime with the dogwoods in bloom, and feel the cooling shade of the spreading limbs of the oak tree. You see the ripening tomatoes, and you can taste their freshness. Do you have that same clear-cut vision concerning your life? Do you know what you want it to look like? Motivational experts know the power of VISUALIZATION. A beautiful garden and a beautiful life both begin with a vision, a dream, an inner picture of what you can be with God's help.

A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN ALSO REQUIRES A PLAN. The great Quaker leader Rufus Jones wrote and published one book a year for more than fifty years. He did this while attending countless meetings, making frequent speeches, editing a magazine and taking care of numerous other duties that his position required. Someone once asked him how under these circumstances he found the time to write so many books. He answered, *"I write my books on Tuesdays."* Throughout his career, he set aside Tuesdays as his one "free" day, accepting no appointments that could be avoided. By following that plan, he left behind a great body of work.

I don't have a garden now, but when I did, before I bought the first seed or plant, before I

turned over the first spade of dirt, I drew up a diagram of what my garden would look like. I knew where everything would be planted. How long the rows would be. I knew the approximate time from planting until harvest, and what I would plant next in those spaces that matured early.

You have heard it before, because it is true: *“Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.”* Jesus talked about the foolishness of those who build towers without first sitting down and figuring the cost. Living for Christ requires that we give some thought to the future. DO YOU HAVE A VISION OF THE LIFE CHRIST WANTS YOU TO LIVE? If not, now is the time to sit down and make a plan. What will you have to do to make that Christ-like life become a reality?

Of course, a meaningful plan for our lives will require long range planning, for it must include all of eternity. To have a beautiful garden, WE MUST COMMIT OURSELVES TO CULTIVATE IT AS LONG AS NECESSARY.

I like what Tom Landry, the former coach of the Dallas Cowboys once said. He said, *“I have a job to do that is not very complicated, but it is difficult. My job is to get a group of men to do what they DON'T want to do, so that they can ACHIEVE the one thing they have wanted all of their lives.”* Isn't that a great statement that also applies to the Christian life? Isn't that what disciplined Christian living is all about. Have you caught a vision of what your life in Christ can be? Discipline is the application of a plan that will move you from where you are, to where you want to be.

Think about your life. Are there some weeds in your garden? Weeds are the enemy of a beautiful garden, whether that garden is a good marriage, or the sanctity of your body, or your family relationships, or your progress in your profession, or your commitment to God. Weeds require no effort, but they can choke out the work of a lifetime. A beautiful garden, on the other hand, requires much effort. It requires vision, planning, and discipline. But the harvest is worth the price!

So heed Jesus' warnings about weeds. God isn't necessarily opposed to sleeping late, or fishing, or playing golf, or visiting with relatives, or working, or relaxing, or watching T.V., only insofar as they become weeds in our lives that threaten to choke out the spiritual discipline in our lives. Successful Christian living requires that we get rid of the weeds that hamper our growth, and diminish a bountiful harvest. What weeds do you need to work on this week?