

Sermon: **Let God Be God - II**  
Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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This is the second parable in chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel. As before, Jesus tells the parable to the crowd and then interprets it for the disciples. It has been called the parable of the weeds. Like the other parables, it pretty much tells itself, so let me tell you a few stories about weeds and how we too easily give an inordinate amount of attention to them

It was an oft-repeated dictum in our household when the children were growing up – “You are responsible for your responses”.

“But Dad...” “Yes, I know, she never should have done that. It wasn't nice at all, but you are responsible for *your* responses.

“But Dad...” “Yes, I agree, that was wrong of him to do that. He needs to change his behavior, but let's think first about what *you* should be doing and how *you* should respond, because you're responsible for your responses.

“But Dad, what about her? What about him? What about the weeds?!?” “Yes, I know, but what about *you*? If you get mad and won't be a friend anymore it will only make things worse. Let's make sure that we are acting right, then maybe we can do something helpful. God knows all about this... about how hurt and angry you are, and all about her and him. You can't take responsibility for what everyone else does, but you *are* responsible for how you respond.”

That's a long, hard lesson for a little kid. My kids, like other kids, were quick to focus on the other guy's wrong and wanted immediate change in the other guy. They wanted to put their hand on it and fix it immediately. And if they couldn't, they expected that Dad could and should and would! They had very little patience with the situation, little trust in God, and very little tolerance for the other guy. “What about the weeds?”

I recall a phone conversation not too long ago with a gentleman I didn't know at all. He called me for some advice. It seemed that he had somehow offended a friend and, despite his repeated apologies, the friend wouldn't forgive him and would have nothing more to do with him. The gentleman on the phone went on and on. “This is so wrong... for him not to forgive me... to just cut me off like this. The more I try to fix things between us the angrier he gets. It's not right that he should not forgive me, don't you agree?”

“Yes, I agree, but how can I help *you*?” He didn't know. I offered to sit down with the two of them if he thought a neutral voice and opinion might be helpful. “No”, he said, “He'd never agree to that.”

“Well”, I said, “it seems to me that if he absolutely refuses to forgive you, as wrong as that may be, you can't force some kind of forgiveness out of him. You can't control him. In your attempts to control him you're actually allowing him to control you. You've got to stop focusing on what he won't do and find your forgiveness and satisfaction in God and move on. God knows your heart and God knows his heart. You can't take responsibility for what he won't do, but you are responsible for how you respond to it.

That's hard for any sensitive adult. It's hard to absorb the hurt rather than trying to exact our own justice on the other guy. And isn't it true, that when we seek to exact our own justice on the other guy, it's usually not for righteousness sake, but for our own satisfaction?

The conversation was focused on the other guy and his wrongs. This man's own sense of wellbeing was contingent upon getting the other guy straightened out, and as a result he had very little patience with the situation, little trust in God, and very little tolerance for the other guy. “What about the weeds?”

There was a sad little church in a town in upstate New York. I got to know the pastor and a little about this sad little church. The pastor and the leadership were intent on purifying the church. It was like they were on a continuous cleansing program. They were on weed patrol. Their bylaws were detailed with what you could and could not do to become a member,

and what you could and could not do to remain a member, and what the church could and could not do to remove you from membership if you didn't adhere to what you should and should not do. It was more about all that stuff than about who they were as the Body of Christ or what they believed their mission was, and how they might fulfill their calling in ministry to their community. As a result, they had very little patience, little trust in God, and very little tolerance for each other. Their church life was an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. They were so fearful of wrong that they had stipulated that they would take no action as a church unless it was by unanimous vote of the congregation. All it took was one or two cantankerous souls to control the church. As a result they did little more than worry about the weeds. That's why I called it a sad little church. Their focus was diverted from Christ the Head of the church and his rule and reign among them and the working of the Holy Spirit in their midst, to weed control... yanking out the bad ones. Instead of purifying the church they sterilized it. It might have been known as "The Church of the Inert"!

They were not letting God be God, in God's own way, in God's own kingdom. They were not letting Christ be the head of the church, or the Spirit of Christ to be the oil of reconciliation. It was always about the weeds.

I remember as an adolescent attending a bible camp where one of the leaders kept talking about the devil, Satan... how he hates God and how he hates us, and how he wants to ruin our lives, and how crafty and tricky he is, and how we must therefore be always on guard lest he trick us. He explained in great detail all of the tactics the devil might use against us.

That was pretty troubling to a young boy, until my mother explained to me... yes, the bible talks about all that but if we spend all our time focusing on the devil, worrying about what he might be up to and trying to outsmart him and defend ourselves, he's got us right where he wants us... sidetracked... focused on him instead of Jesus. "Yes", she said, "be careful and alert to wrong and to temptation, but focus on Jesus, not the devil."

If you hadn't noticed, we're presently in the midst of a presidential election campaign. I can't remember when we weren't. Have you noticed how each side is continually on the prowl to uncover dirt on the other candidate or on anyone with whom that candidate has ever associated? It makes us suspicious and fearful, and it makes the candidate go on damage control. It gets him off-message, spending time and energy and money yanking weeds. The media perpetuates and feeds the conflict, adding more questions... "What about the weeds?"...till no one is involved in a cogent discussion of the real issues that confront us as a nation and world.

Well, I think that's about enough. You get the point. Let's not focus on the weeds in our personal relationships or in our church life and ministry. Let's let God be God in God's own way in God's own kingdom.

Why does God allow evil to exist? Why do bad things happen to good people? These are good and reasonable questions. But we must not allow ourselves to be so threatened by the evil and the wrongs of others around us. The bible says we must "not fret over evil doers". We must not try to manipulate the kingdom of God, or to attempt to manage and control it. When we do we become alarmed and impulsive, always-only seeing the problems, and we go on weed control and usually over-spray. I remember the first time I used *Round Up*. I tried to get rid of a few weeds and lost some grass and some flowers. Talk about collateral damage.

Remember, the kingdom of God... the reign of God... is not so much about what we're able to do. It's about what God is doing in God's own way *through us!* So let's let God be God. That takes a lot of patience, and a lot of trust and hope in God, and it allows for a lot of tolerance of others.

Now, all of this is not to suggest that we are to passively put up with evil and take it lightly, or that we never confront evil or wrongdoers, or that we do not engage in the work of reconciliation and reformation. We are called to reconciliation and the doing of justice. But we are *not* called to condemnation and damnation.

We must exercise godly discernment of right and wrong, good and evil, and then give ourselves wholeheartedly to doing what is right and good. But we do not make the ultimate

determination as to who are the good people and who are not, much less separate and eliminate those we deem evil, i.e. yank the weeds. It will take godly wisdom to know when to step in, taking responsible steps for the good and for righteousness sake, motivated by the love of Christ; and to know when not to over-step, taking preemptive steps, prompted by the fear of evil. This will take godly patience, trust and tolerance... letting God be God.

Both Jesus and Paul make it clear that we should hate evil and cling to what is good. We should not try to overcome evil with evil, but to overcome evil with good.

Remember the scripture:

*Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*

Pray the prayer of St. Anselm:

*If I ever ask for them anything  
Which is outside your perfect rule of love,  
Whether through weakness, ignorance or malice,  
Good Lord, do not give it to them  
And do not give it back to me.*

Don't get over-focused on the weed around you and go on weed patrol. Cultivate the wheat, and let God be God in God's own way in God's own kingdom.

Amen.