

**The Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer**  
**July 23, 2017**  
**Matthew 13:24-30,36-43**

It was five minutes before class was over when Peter raised his hand. He was a good student, but sometimes he liked to ask questions just to prove it. “Why is there so much evil in the world?”

Some eyes rolled, some groaned -- some audibly, some secretly, but our teacher showed no signs of irritation.

“A farmer invested all she had into a prized crop of wheat. But when it sprouted weeds sprouted also. ‘What happened?’ asked the farm manager. ‘My next door neighbor must have snuck over in the night and planted the weeds.’ ‘Should we pull them up?’ asked the day laborers. ‘No,’ said the farmer, ‘Wait until the plants are mature, otherwise you may pull up the good wheat with the bad weeds. When the harvest comes I’ll have you harvest it all and separate it, the good from the bad. We’ll gather the wheat for the market and burn all the weeds.’”

The bell rang and everyone ran for the door, but I stayed behind.

“Teacher, do you really believe there is an evil one, equally powerful as God battling it out every day on earth?”

“What do you think? I am a good Jew. I believe in one God, all-powerful, all knowing, all loving, nothing is stronger than God. The evil one is just what us humans like to call things, people, and events that we can’t explain or don’t want to take responsibility for.”

“The devil made me do it?”

“Exactly.”

“Teacher, do you really think there are evil people and good people?”

“Kara, ask a gardener, there are no such things as weeds, just the wrong plants in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Sometimes so many we call them invasive species and they threaten every other living thing and the eco system itself.”

“True. How did they invasive species get their start?”

“Humans.” I sighed, “Humans who thought they were doing something good. But the story...Can the weeds turn into wheat? Or good wheat become bad weeds?”

For the first time the Teacher sighs. “The parable of the wheat in the weeds is not a lesson in identifying weeds and wheat. It is about not deciding between them. Let time and God decide.”

“I don’t get to point out the weeds?”

“Don’t judge.”

“What if the weeds and wheat are my own behaviors? Should I just do what I want?”

“Don’t judge yourself. Have patience.”

“What about injustice? Are you saying ignore it? Let history play out? Shouldn’t we make amends for racism and other systematic injustice? Shouldn’t we change them?”

“People are not weeds and wheat. Deeds are. Can you judge the deeds and not the people?”

“In South Africa, after apartheid was over Bishop Desmond Tutu and others set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It took years for everyone to tell their stories, victims to the perpetrators. Perpetrators admitted every evil act they had committed. It took years, but it helped the people and the society heal. The same process was used in Rwanda after the genocide.

In Norway the maximum security prison is out in the woods. There is no fence. Each inmate has their own room and bathroom. They cook their own food in a kitchen equipped with knives; they work in the wood shop. Some go out to jobs in the community and come back at night on their own. The guards work and play with the inmates; they become friends. Those who are released after serving their sentences rarely offend again.”

“I think you are getting the idea.”

“I know it’s almost time for lunch. But I have another question. We read the story of Jacob today, of his dream of a ladder ascending into heaven. He takes the stone that was his pillow and makes it into an altar and calls the place the house of God and the gate of heaven.”

“You want to know if there are good places and evil places? What happens when we judge a place to belong to a certain person or people? How is that working out in the land of my birth? What is it you say when the bread and wine and money are offered at the altar?”

“All things come of thee o Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.”

“I see. You knew all the answers already. Weeds and wheat, growing together.”