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“Weeds into Wheat” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (7/23/2023, Eighth Sunday after Pentecost)

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Let us pray. Almighty God made the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

So I'd like to begin with an announcement starting next Sunday, we will have a new seating arrangement in church. I know you are used to where you sit and you feel as if there's some invisible plaque designating it as your spot. However, next Sunday, we're going to do something different and going forward, we'll do this where all the good people will sit on this side of the church. The pulpit side where I am. And then on that side, we'll have all the bad people. And you may be wondering, well, Zimmerman, how will you tell? Well, the plan is to have the pastoral team I've already briefed owl and Cara and Andrew and we will conduct interviews over the coming week. And just so you can have an idea of what the questions will be like. Here's one when presented a screen paying your bill and you're offered a choice of tipping amount. Do you go with the bare stingy minimum of 15% the merely adequate 20% or the truly righteous 25%? Have you ever used the word literally when really? You're being figurative? You know when she told me I literally died? No, you didn't. That's not what that word means.

Have you ever worn crocs that's that's just the question. Nothing nothing else just that

finally Have you ever bought a large social media company for \$44 billion and then ruined it for everyone

what's that bishop Doyle? Fine. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah, no, sure. Got it. Change of plans. We will Napoli be implementing the new seating arrangement you can keep sitting where you are. That was so dumb. Anyways. I bring this up to say though, even

though we will not divide the church between good and bad, righteous and wicked, that is a thing people do all the time. In the church, yes. Some of you have had experiences where the culture of the church the dominant theology was to say, the people inside these walls are the good people. And everybody out there going to hell in a handbasket. Sometimes it's around denominational issues, not just these walls, maybe it's everybody on our team are the good ones and others are not. And the church does get a bad rap and may be sometimes well deserved for doing this thing. But really, human beings do this in every space in which they inhabit. This is what sports rivalries are based on. This is what happens every time you bought a plane. You have to walk past all those good people in first class, as they drink their champagne and eat their canopies where you feel like the lowly person going back, you know, like on the Titanic, Leonardo DiCaprio, like in the undercarriage. This is what happens in theme parks, you know, the people who pay for the Fast Pass, they get to go to the headline, and then, you know, all the rest of the folks standing out there for five hours in the Florida Sun. The people who we do this politically, you know, the people that agree with me are right and good. And the people that don't are bad. And every wherever you get your news, whether it's something you watch or something you read, there's almost always sort of this is what we believe the right and correct people and then everybody else is on the other side of that. So this is just something human beings do. divide the world into these polls, these dualistic ways of thinking. And this is something that Jesus talks about in Matthew 13, the parable we just heard read this way of thinking, but as often happens with our Lord is that his take on it is surprising. There's a twist, not what you expect. And so from this story that I want to talk about what that twist is what we learned from it, and I want to try to answer why that happens. Because I think the Y says something really helpful. So here we are. Matthew 13, Jesus is giving all these teachings in what are called parables which are stories that use something from everyday life that are supposed to illustrate something about spiritual reality. And its agricultural story our continued so he's in this rural societies, agrarian society using things that people know about to connect. And so people would have known exactly what he's talking about somebody sowing seed in a field. It's not something maybe you have done, but his crowd certainly knew what he was talking about. They also knew what he was talking about when he said an enemy comes in SOS seed at night. So he says, This guy plants his wheat field, and then while everybody's sleeping, some villain comes up and sews seed. And this was a very specific kind of thing. It wasn't just a generic seed, nobody blowing little dandelion puff into his wheat field. This was a plant that in English is called Darnell, which I think is really funny. Like a sort of like a name somebody from where I'm from North Carolina, Darnell, you know, Darnay, Allah told you. So in Latin, if you're fancier lolium

turbulenten. But here's a plant that looks exactly like wheat as it grows. And you cannot tell that it is not wheat until the very end of the plant's lifecycle, after the little grain has appeared in the head, and the seeds of the Darnell turn a little darker. And then you know, you thought you had a bumper crop of wheat, it was look as great. This was known in the ancient world, because in Roman law, it was actually illegal. And so Jesus's audience knows what he's talking about. And how annoying this would be. If you're you have this what looks like a great wheat crop. And then at the very end of the season, as you're preparing to harvest, you see that it's actually mixed in with all these weeds. And so in the story, the workers on the farm, go to the farmer and say, What should we do? Should we just rip out all the weeds? And he says, No, because he knows that that Darnell root system would get intertwined with the wheat. And then if you pull it out, you pull out everything. So he says, Just wait until the Harvest, harvest everything together, and then separate it, and God will sort it out. In the end, it's a metaphor. The world is the field. And the wheat seeds, the good seeds are the children of the Son of Man, it says, And you let God sorted out in the end. So this is the story. And in it, we learn a couple of things. We learned something first about the world. Contrary to what maybe we sometimes think the world is a very mixed place. And you may say you already knew that, but many people act like it's not or that there are parts of the world that are not mixed. I'll give you an example what I'm talking about here, let's say you raise your child in a Christian home, your church every Sunday, you are very careful about what they watch and listen to. And then you send them to a Christian private school. And then when it's time for college, you send them to a Christian college. I don't know if you can think of any but just any, any Christian College will do. Because if they go to a Christian college with rules, and dorms where the boys are here and the girls are here, not like those godless Northeastern schools if you can get them no Christian College, that's a place just for wheat. There'll be no bad influences. They won't drink smoke, or chew or go with girls who do. There'll be protected. Because it's only wheat. There are no weeds. Right? Jesus says the wheat and the weeds are together, which means there's no such thing as a good neighborhood. There might be a neighborhood that looks nicer from the curb. But what happens inside the house, that's the same everywhere wheat and weeds together. So what this means is that there's not like this magical safe place where you can go to escape the human condition. It also means that in the worst place in the world, the you will find people that are wheat. And as Jesus says here, in a rather controversial statement, you can't tell them apart. You think when you're checking at HEB you can look at people's carts and tell whether they're good or bad. A lot of frozen food on a TV dinners, right you've judged it You're not laughing but you know you've done it. Look at me with my fresh produce look at all the Maybe bok choy I have.

We tend to think that there are arenas of human experience where it's sort of all good. church splits are all about this, we're just going to take the wheat. This church has been full of weeds, we're going to take the wheat and we're going to go start new church will be perfect. Give it a generation or two, or five minutes. But you'll find wherever you go, if you thought it was all wheat, it was all it's mixed. It's wheat and weeds. There are saints in Vegas and sinners in the church. That's just so this is what Jesus says. And we learned something about ourselves. It's implied here that not only can we not really tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds, you're very bad at judging. But also, it is not your job. There are many Christians, we think that it is their job. But Jesus says it's not. To quote two American poets that have had a long career of collaborating together, Cheryl James and Sandra Denton, aka salt and pepper. From their 1993, single and single, it's none of your business. Right? It's not your job to sort people out. So we learn about the world. It's mixed. We learn about us, this is not our job. And we learned something about God, which is not a new thing. But it's something we forget a lot. It's in the Psalm you hear today, Psalm 86, verse 15, it says, the way it puts it, there's God is slow to anger. Another way of putting it as God is exceedingly patient. We are so busy trying to sort out people. But it is God's job to worry about that. And apparently, he is not in as much of a hurry as we are. He seems to be really patient to let the wheat and the weeds grow together. And so, here's the thing, though, where Jesus is parable, I think invites us to go a little bit deeper and ask why in the world would that be? Why would God not sort things out? Now we want him to sort things out now. Get rid of all the bad people and annoying folks and all the difficult Croc wares of the world. You know, get rid of the folks, in our families or in our workplaces or in our lives. Why does God let these people just be why does he let the weeds continue to grow next to the wheat. When the world was great, it was just all wheat. I think, looking at how God reveals who God is in Scripture, and this is really reaches a high point where Jesus, Jesus says, If you want to know what God is like, Look at me. And something that Jesus does all the time, it's apparently his favorite thing to do is to find weeds. And to make them wheat. That's why he wants them to stick around. Because he wants to bring them in. In Matthew 9:13, and Luke 5:32. And Mark 2:17. You know, it's important when it happens three times. Jesus says, I didn't come to call the righteous people. But I came to call sinners. In other words, I didn't come for the wheat, I came for the weeds. And you see it in what he does every time he meets somebody who's in that weed category, potentially, somebody like Matthew, the tax collector who's made a deal with the devil and the Roman Empire, exploiting his own people for his own benefit. And Jesus finds him and says, Come be on my team. He doesn't when he finds St. Paul killing Christians and persecuting them, he

says, Come be on my team, the woman at the well who everybody else would have ignored. He says, Come be on my team. And you can find plenty of modern examples as well. At least more modern than Bible times, if my favorite is John Newton in the 18th century, he was somebody who was had zero morals and a lot of money because he was high up in the transatlantic slave trade. He was a human traffickers what we would say today, and he had a powerful experience where he realized who he was, he repudiated his whole prior life and devoted himself to God was ordained in that church of England. And you know him as the guy who wrote the lyrics to Amazing Grace. The same God who does things like take water and turn it in A wine who takes dead people and makes them alive again, who tells a criminal being crucified next to him on a cross? Today you'll be with me in paradise. His favorite thing is to find weeds and to make them wheat. That's why he lets him stick around. Now, for some of you, you may be wondering, as we heard that Gospel passage read, like, Am I Am I a wheat or a weed? Am I had Darnell, because, you know, Jesus says, Don't be anxious, and I am anxious all the time. He says, Don't worry, and that is my hobby. He says, don't have naughty thoughts. And I've had some. He says, to be kind and loving, even to our enemies. And I'm not that he says to forgive and I just can't. So you're sort of stuck in what Steve Earle calls the transcendental blues. You're worried that you might be a weed. And I would say, just look at what the teller of this story does, after he finishes telling it, which is to say, He Himself becomes a weed. He dies as a transgressor a lawbreaker, a sinner on the cross, to give himself to say he is with you. It's not far away. He's with you. That you a weed might become wheat. And if God has his way at the end of the age at the harvest there really won't be much to burn because it seems his favorite thing is to find weeds and to make them wheat. Amen.