

Sermon July 19, 2026

Matthew 13:24-30

The Message (MSG)

The Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat

Jesus told another story. "God's kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. That night, while his hired men were asleep, his enemy sowed thistles all through the wheat and slipped away before dawn. When the first green shoots appeared and the grain began to form, the thistles showed up, too.

"The farmhands came to the farmer and said, 'Master, that was clean seed you planted, wasn't it? Where did these thistles come from?'

"He answered, 'Some enemy did this.'

"The farmhands asked, 'Should we weed out the thistles?'

"He said, 'No, if you weed the thistles, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time. Then I'll instruct the harvesters to pull up the thistles and tie them in bundles for the fire, then gather the wheat and put it in the barn.'"

Jesus dismissed the congregation and went into the house. His disciples came in and said, "Explain to us that story of the thistles in the field."

So he explained. "The farmer who sows the pure seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the pure seeds are subjects of the kingdom, the thistles are subjects of the Devil, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, the curtain of history. The harvest hands are angels.

"The picture of thistles pulled up and burned is a scene from the final act. The Son of Man will send his angels, weed out the thistles from his kingdom, pitch them in the trash, and be done with them. They are going to complain to high heaven, but nobody is going to listen. At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of God.

"Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

Climbing the Ladder

I used to hate it when my mother wanted me to help her weed. I would look helplessly at the mass of greenery. Which is a weed and which has the potential to be a flower? No matter how hard I tried, I would uproot the wrong plant.

And to make matters worse, some of the weeds are just as beautiful in my eyes as any flower. When I was in first grade, I spent my entire lunch period picking the biggest, most beautiful bouquet for my teacher. A bouquet of bright, vibrant dandelions. She took one look and hurled my precious gift out of the window and declared: "I will not have weeds in my classroom."

So, I suppose it is a good thing that I am not the one responsible for deciding who among us is wheat and who is a weed. I'm just not very good at it.

The truth is, we are all a tangle of weeds and wheat and flowers. Sometimes, the weeds choke the life out of us, but it is hard to know where to begin in rooting them out. Sometimes when we try to get rid of the weeds, we accidentally pull up the strong, growing plants.

God plants goodness and we have the best of intentions to follow God's words and to work towards a beloved community of peace and justice. But, it is not enough. Too much gets in our way, impeding our ability to grow: weeds that distract us... whose beauty lures us in the wrong direction. The damage is done when the weeds- no matter how beautiful they may be- separate us from the one who loves us so much.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who are a mix of the best and the worst that can grow in a garden. Over the last few weeks we have listened to the stories of our ancestors... those first ones chosen and blessed by God. Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Esau and Jacob. God saw something special in each of them... something so special that God knew they would be the ones to take root and grow an entire nation. And yet, they keep acting more like weeds than wheat! They lie... they manipulate... they

betray one another. And no matter what they do, God keeps calling them back... Over and over again.

We have reached the third generation of the covenant. Esau and Jacob were twins, and they were born struggling for the privilege of being the first born, the one who simply by birth order would inherit their father's wealth and God's promise of a destiny. Jacob fought so hard to be born first that he came out of the womb clutching Esau's heel, trying to pull him back. The competition continued as they grew up. Jacob, his mother's favorite child, tricked Esau out of his birthright – all for a cup of soup. Later, as their father lay on his deathbed, he stole his brother's blessing too. Jacob glued fur to his arm to fool his elderly, blind father into thinking it was his hairy son Esau. A father tried to right a wrong and is tricked into making the situation worse.

After Isaac dies, Esau is ready to kill his brother. Jacob runs away to hide waiting until the coast is clear. It would take 20 years before he returned home, but of course he didn't know that. He has only traveled 50 miles from home, but he might as well have traveled halfway around the world. He is alone in the wilderness. More alone than he has ever been in his life. More alone than most of us will ever be. No human beings for miles.

It must have been a frightening night for Jacob. I wonder if he remembered his actions with regret. He is isolated from his family and his community, and he did it to himself. Sitting alone in the dark, watching for wild animals, he knew that his wounds were self-inflicted and he had no idea how to right the wrongs.

How often do we do that to ourselves? We say or do things that hurt the people we love. We try to make it better, but half the time we simply make it worse. The anger grows and festers and it seems impossible for healing to ever happen. Those are wilderness times... when there is nowhere that we can lay our head. We feel alone, even when we are surrounded by our family or neighbors.

As Jacob sat in the dark wilderness, exhaustion overcame his fear. He looked around for a place to sleep. Nothing. So, finally he took a hard rock for his pillow and closed his eyes and tried to forget how alone he felt.

But he was not truly alone. Even in the depth of the darkness, God and the angels keep a watchful eye on him. God comes to him in a dream. God looks for us, wherever we are and comes to us in the most unexpected places. God comes to Jacob, just as God comes to us today, to renew the promises given to his parents and grandparents. Jacob is stuck in the middle of nowhere when that dream touches down. He is not where he is supposed to be, but God comes to him where he is.

And God comes to us, wherever we are too.

That's the beauty of these ancient stories. No matter how much we mess up, God is true to the sacred promises. God does not give up on us and even seeks us out when we are stranded in the middle of the wilderness.

There is something deeper here for us to remember as well. God comes to us as individuals, but God also comes to us as part of a sacred community. God comes to us in the here and now but God always has a vision for a holy future. No matter who we are, no matter what we've done, we are a part of something greater than we can imagine.

"I'll stay with you, I'll protect you wherever you go, and I'll bring you back to this very ground. I'll stick with you until I've done everything I promised you."

This is a promise that has lasted throughout the ages. It is a promise we need to hear today, as God's Chosen Ones continue to fight over that same sacred ground and blood is shed on the land that Abraham was promised. We need to hear the promises today, thousands of miles away from that place. We need to hear those promises, especially those of us who face the darkness of the wilderness today.

Today let us remember that true blessing comes from God and is available to us today. Let us join Jacob, even as he nestles his head on that hard stone. And in our dreams, God will come to us, touch down in our lives...

reminding us that we sleep at the gate of heaven. When God's ladder comes down to our own ordinary pieces of earth, we are reminded that as we dream our dreams, God will form them into hopes and visions that will change our world forever. Amen

✧ **Sending Forth**

Go now as people who have seen God in unexpected places.
May the road rise to meet you with blessing,
may the fields around you whisper hope,
and may the light of God find you
even in the deepest night.

Go in peace,
to love and to serve.
Amen.

Prayer Station Ideas

Genesis 28:10–19a • Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 • Psalm 139

1. “Surely God Is in This Place” – Jacob’s Stone Pillow

Theme: God meets us in unexpected places.

Setup:

- A basket of stones
- A small cloth or mat
- Sticky notes and pens

2. “Wheat and Weeds” Sorting Station

Theme: Discernment, patience, and God’s slow work.

Setup:

- Two bowls: one labeled *Wheat*, one labeled *Weeds*
- A basket of mixed items (beans + small twigs, or paper slips with words)
- Seed packets and directions
- A prompt card

Practice: Invite people to sort the items, noticing how hard it is to separate them. Then pray: *“God, give me patience with what is tangled in me and in the world. Teach me to wait for Your wisdom.”*

This becomes a tactile parable.

3. “Search Me, O God” – Psalm 139 Reflection

Theme: Being fully known and fully loved.

Setup:

- A mirror
- A candle or soft light
- A printed excerpt from Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24
- A small bowl of water