**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

Bean Blossom, Indiana

July 23, 2023, Pentecost 8A

**Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson**

Genesis 28:10-19a Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23 Romans 8:12-25 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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### Good morning. It worries me to preach about anything ground/farming/gardening related. I still blush at my sermon here about Matthew Chapter 5 – the salt of the earth and the light of the world. I gave myself away as a long-time urban dweller whose feet were more at home on cement than rich and fragrant earth. Most everyone preaches about the light of the world but I went on a bender about salt and how it destroys earth. Every one of you held your tongues. No one corrected me, although it was common knowledge to everyone other than me that fertilizers are full of salts – and were known even in the time of Jesus as something that was good for the soil. They may not have known about phosphates, but they got the idea. Thank you for your graciousness.

### And here we are again: wheat and weeds. I moved to Chicago from New York City. About my third week as a mid-Westerner, my boss invited me to her home in the country. I volunteered to help her weed her garden… Ok, you know where this is going. She checked on my progress after half an hour and shrieked. I had carefully removed the plants, leaving the weeds in place. Humiliated, I put those puppies back in the ground as carefully as I could.

### I admit it. I have a Masters of Divinity, not Horticulture. So I’m only going to tiptoe around the horticultural aspects of our Gospel from Matthew. Just a little. Emerson wrote that weeds are just plants whose virtues are still to be learned. The thing is that the weeds Jesus is describing are dangerous, and the difference between a dandelion and these weeds uncovers the intensity of Jesus’ concern.

### Scriptural theologians say the Greek word we see as *weeds* would be more accurately called *tares.* Tares grow widely throughout the Middle East to this day. Here, we call them bearded darnels*.* Bearded darnel roots wrap around the wheat roots. The early growth looks almost exactly like wheat, but it will kill the wheat. Pulling it out in early growth will uproot the wheat, destroying the crop. But it gets worse: when the bearded darnel begins to seed it is clearly not wheat, and those seeds can cause hallucinations and death.

### Could Jesus be any clearer in saying that evil lives amidst the good? And this time, Jesus explains the parable so there is no question about what he means. He explains the cause of evil. Worst of all, in this parable the evil Sower acts with the intention of destroying it all. The intention is so warped and evil that only the Son of Man can separate the two, bringing the justice of an inferno.

### Jesus’ message is that the Christian community to come will be a mixture of the good, the seeds sowed by “The Son of Man” and by the disciples and all of us thereafter. And the community will include evil members, sowed by the devil with the single intention of destroying the good, choking out the good. This is a chilling view of the present and the future. Jesus’ recommends that this will all be sorted out when Jesus returns to judge, to separate the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats. He suggests in this passage that judging is up to God, not to mortals. Perhaps that is why, some years ago, Pope Francis said, “Who am I to judge?” There is a kind of comfort in thinking that those who harm us will pay in the end. We don’t feel so powerless over situations that feel like tidal waves crushing us and dragging us out to sea.

### It's here. We all heard it. It gives us reasons to be patient and leave judgment up to God. It gives us the roots of our current depiction of hell, and even of purgatory. They’ll pay a little or a lot. Divine retribution. Are we to simply let it be, become door mats, wait for the sweet by-and-by? I want more from my Good News. I want to follow Jesus in living in this morally mixed, messy society, in upholding justice, in acting humbly, in loving actively. That’s what I see in the broad view of Jesus’ teaching and living. Jesus’ embraced the imperfect and built it up. He reached out to folks who were unmistakably human, and loved them.

### Jesus clearly knew the limits of his disciples, their enthusiastic over-responses and clueless failures to understand. He knew that many of the Jewish elders – Pharisees and civic leaders such as the king, appeared by all the standard signs and symbols to be among the good and blessed but were far from it. He knew the intentions in their hearts, their tares….yet when Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, unsure of his faith, question but seeking, reached out to Jesus, he was welcomed. He knew that people act foolishly and sinfully, sometimes with evil intention and sometimes while striving to grow and reflect the light of Christ to all around them. Jesus knew that we fail, hurting others because we are afraid we will lose something we have or not get something we want. Jesus knows that we will turn our backs on Jesus’ because our pride blinds us to the path he has drawn. Jesus knows that hurt pride and anger can bring the best people down. In fact, chapter 18 in Matthew we have instructions for handling differences and difficulties in our faith communities.

### Such operating instructions are helpful, but the base is so much deeper.

1 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; \*  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.

4 You press upon me behind and before \*  
and lay your hand upon me.

9 Even there your hand will lead me \*  
and your right hand hold me fast.

### God loves us as we are. Jesus seals the deal with a constant welcome, a joyful return. A home in Christ.

### We know in our hearts where our spiritual wheat is growing and where our tares thrive. Which shall we feed? Which shall we water? Which is life giving? Which will we, with so much care and the grace of Christ, pluck out? At the ever-widening community levels, how will we nurture the wheat and pluck out the tares? Our faith in the love of Christ and our thanksgiving for it will lead us to wisdom and just action. We will do what we can, with God’s help.

### Thanks be to God.