

PROPER ELEVEN, PENTECOST 8, JULY 19, 2026

There is something deep within all of us that longs for the world to be simple. We want to know who the good people are and who the bad people are. We want clear categories: saints and sinners, heroes and villains, insiders and outsiders. We want certainty. We want quick justice. We want to believe that if only we could pull up all the weeds the wheat would flourish.

Jesus refuses to give us that kind of world. Instead, he tells us about a farmer who sows good seed. Then, while everyone is asleep, an enemy comes and scatters weeds among the wheat. When the servants discover what has happened, they are horrified. "Master, didn't you sow good seed? Where did these weeds come from?"

It is the question every generation asks. If God is good, why is there evil? Why are there wars? Why does violence continue? Why does racism endure? Why are people exploited while others grow rich? Why do children suffer? Why does addiction destroy families? Why does grief arrive without warning? Why is there illness in someone so young? Why does hatred seem to spread so easily?

Where did these weeds come from? The servants immediately offer a solution. "Do you want us to pull them up?" Of course they do. And if we're honest, so do we. We like problems with quick solutions. We like believing we know exactly who the weeds are. We imagine the world would be a better place if only those people were removed.

Our culture has become remarkably skilled at identifying weeds. Every day we divide people according to politics, race, immigration status, religion, sexuality, wealth, education, or ideology. Social media has become one giant weed-pulling operation. We shame. We cancel. We demonize. We reduce human beings to labels.

Even the Church has not escaped this temptation. History reminds us that Christians have often been painfully certain about who the weeds were. At different times we declared women, Indigenous peoples, enslaved people, immigrants, jews, muslims or those who believed differently to be outside God's grace. Too often we confused our certainty with God's wisdom.

Then Jesus says something astonishing. "No." Do not pull them up. Because if you do, you may uproot the wheat along with them. That answer feels unsatisfying. Wouldn't it be better if God simply removed evil? Wouldn't the world be safer? But Jesus understands something about both fields and human hearts.

The weed he describes—darnel—looks almost identical to wheat while it is growing. Their roots become intertwined beneath the soil. Pull one carelessly, and you destroy the other. Jesus is telling us something about judgment. We are far less capable of distinguishing wheat from weeds than we imagine.

That does not mean evil isn't real. Jesus never minimizes evil. There is an enemy. There are weeds. There is injustice. There is violence. There is greed that crushes the poor. There are lies disguised as truth. There are systems built on racism, exploitation, and fear.

The prophets never ignored those realities. Amos thundered against those who trampled the poor. Isaiah condemned worship divorced from justice. Micah reminded God's people that the Lord requires us "to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly."

Jesus himself overturned tables when religion became an accomplice to exploitation. The Gospel never asks us to ignore evil. But it does ask us to distinguish between resisting evil and condemning people.

That is much harder. Because evil is rarely as obvious as we think. Sometimes hatred disguises itself as patriotism. Sometimes prejudice disguises itself as tradition. Greed disguises itself as freedom. Violence disguises itself as security. Sometimes religious certainty disguises itself as faithfulness. And sometimes the weeds are growing quietly within our own hearts.

Perhaps that is the most uncomfortable truth in this parable. The line between wheat and weeds does not simply run through society. It runs through every one of us. Within each of us are seeds of generosity and selfishness, courage and fear, compassion and resentment, faith and doubt. Saint Augustine once observed that the greatest battlefield is not out there in the world but within the human soul.

The good news is that Christ has not abandoned us because of that. Every day he patiently cultivates the wheat within us through prayer, worship, Scripture, forgiveness, and acts of mercy. God is not finished with us yet. And if God is not finished with us, perhaps we should be slower to conclude that God is finished with anyone else.

Think of Saul, who persecuted Christians before becoming Paul the Apostle. Think of Zacchaeus, who exploited his neighbors before generosity transformed his life. Think of Peter, who denied Jesus three times before becoming the rock upon which Jesus built the Church. Had someone uprooted them too soon, we would never know the power of redemption.

God sees possibilities we cannot yet see. Grace has remarkable patience. That is why Jesus refuses to hand us the sickle. Instead, he gives us another vocation. Grow. Notice that the wheat does nothing extraordinary. It simply becomes what it was created to be. It bears fruit. It nourishes the world. It does not spend its energy policing the weeds.

Perhaps that is the Church's calling today. Imagine if we spent less time identifying weeds and more time growing wheat. Imagine communities where lonely people found family. Where children were safe. Where the hungry were fed. Where immigrants found welcome. Where enemies discovered reconciliation. Where every person knew they were beloved by God. That is how the Kingdom grows. Not because Christians become better judges. But because they become better disciples. The field, Jesus says, is the world. And every person in that field belongs to God. The person you fear. The person who votes differently. The refugee. The prisoner. The addict. The wealthy executive. The homeless veteran. The difficult family member. The police officer. The angry protester. The one who hurt you. The one you struggle to understand. None of them belongs to us. They belong to God.

Only God knows the roots beneath the surface. Only God knows what grace is still unfolding. One day justice will come. Every wrong will be made right. Every hidden truth will be revealed—not by our wisdom, but by God's perfect justice and abundant mercy.

Until then, our calling is wonderfully clear. Keep sowing good seed. Keep growing. Keep bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Practice mercy. Seek justice. Tell the truth with love. Feed the hungry. Welcome the stranger. Forgive generously. Refuse the temptation to write anyone off. Trust that goodness is never wasted and that grace can still change lives. Because the Kingdom of God does not grow through fear or condemnation. It grows

every time a disciple chooses love over hatred, hope over despair, mercy over vengeance, and humility over self-righteousness.

Remember, the only Gospel some people may encounter this week is your life. The only glimpse of Jesus they may see is in the way you treat them. So let us devote ourselves to becoming the kind of wheat that nourishes a weary world. For the future belongs not to evil, but to God. And that is very good news. Amen.