

Matthew 13:30 First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. ”

The truth is, we all love a good story. Even in this age of Facebook, memes, tweets, and WhatsApp, telling a good story connects us liking nothing else. In his article, “Why Storytelling Nights are Suddenly Everywhere,” author Lee Chilcote explains,

Nearly everyone I spoke with pointed to the Internet when explaining the renewed interest in storytelling but not necessarily for the reasons you’d think. Ironically, while social media make DIY [storytelling] events possible, our virtual lives can also make us feel lonely and disconnected. We hunger for real connections, the communal experience of sitting around and talking about real things, and that’s what storytelling is all about.

Even though it was long before the invention of Facebook, WhatsApp, or even storytelling nights, Jesus used storytelling to connect with people like never before. Only, it wasn’t just about connecting with people, it was also about disconnecting with people. That’s why he told stories, parables, about the Kingdom of God.

“Compared to His earlier teaching [in Matthew chapter 5] during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ turn to parables might seem odd. He’d used clear instruction to teach His followers how to live and about the Kingdom of God, and he’d exhibited the Kingdom in a tangible way through his miracles. But suddenly, when the crowds come to hear Him, he hops into a boat and speaks in parables, stories about sowing seeds and gathering wheat.

When the disciples ask Him why, since they obviously noticed the change, His answer may seem even more astonishing: ***To you it has been granted to know the***

mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it has not been granted (Matthew 13:11). In other words, the parables are meant to divide the crowd. While this may seem as if Jesus denied some people access, the difference he means is not in the message—but in the response.

The parables themselves present clear stories from everyday events that many in the crowd would recognize. Jesus did not code His teaching to prevent some people from understanding, since all equally would understand the imagery. All those gathered there certainly comprehended the aspects of the stories related to their everyday lives. Instead, His teaching divided the listeners into two groups based on their own responses.”¹

As Jesus explained to the disciples, the telling of these stories, these parables, was the long-term fulfillment of what Isaiah was called to do in the short-term: ***Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. ’¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*** (Isaiah 6:9,10)

This explains why the parable of the weeds and wheat – the wheat and the tares, as some of you may know it – is so striking, even mysterious.

In some ways the parable is a bit like when someone tells a joke and you don’t get it. Some of us are willing to admit it, but others of us, especially when we’re young and lots of other people are laughing, we might not want to fess up to our ignorance. The disciples were no exception. They asked Jesus about the meaning of the parable, but not until later when they were alone.

Picture the scene: After Jesus has spent some time instructing his disciples and preparing them to go out among the villages, Jesus heads north to preach among the towns of Galilee. Already people are starting

¹ Adapted from *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim (Book III, Chapter XXIII). @ <http://www.jesus.org/life-of-jesus/parables/why-did-jesus-teach-in-parables.html>

to question Jesus and his message. The Pharisees have identified him as a threat. Even his own family thinks he's off his rocker.

But then one day, the crowds following him are so numerous, that they gather on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus gets into a boat, taking the opportunity to teach them about the Kingdom of God. Using the wheat nearing the harvest that covered the hillsides along the seashore, Jesus shares with them a series of parables starting with the parable of the Sower and the Seed and moving on to the parable of the weeds and the wheat.

Perhaps these parables aren't as vivid for us as his first hearers from the perspective that most of us have never sowed seed on that scale by hand or labored through the reaping, threshing, and storing process. But most of us have enjoyed watching the process on a smaller scale. We plant and grow tomatoes and peas, cucumbers and lettuce in our home gardens. And we long for the first taste of the sun-ripened fruit of our labors.

But imagine going through all of the work to plant your home garden with its prepared soil, neat rows, and marked plants, only to come out one morning to find that a neighboring dog has burrowed in overnight and dug it up. Not surprisingly, you might say, ***An enemy did this.***

But what would you do? Get out the rototiller and start over? Or would you let it go and see what comes up? Considering that your livelihood and financial means don't ride on the success of your home garden, you might go either way. But for the owner in Jesus' parable, he was willing to let both the weeds and the wheat grow together. He had so much invested in the sowing, that he was willing to put in the extra time and work it would take to do the separating later, rather than risk losing any of the good plants.

To a certain degree, this makes sense. The weeds most likely sown were a plant called darnel – a Eurasian ryegrass. It looks like wheat until it is a little more matured and the developing fruit identifies it as a noxious weed. Further, the weed roots

would already be entangled with the wheat roots and would pull up the good with the bad. And so, you could probably just chalk up the owner's decision to curious, but I suppose careful management...

...until you realize the point of the story. Then it all becomes crystal clear. It is interesting that Jesus explained the parable of the sower and the seed to the disciples without their asking. But later they were curious about the parable of the weeds and the wheat and had to ask. Jesus explained, ***The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.*** ³⁸ ***The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,*** ³⁹ ***and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.*** ⁴⁰ ***"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.*** ⁴¹ ***The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.*** ⁴² ***They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** ⁴³ ***Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.***

You see, it is always about the barn. When Satan defiled God's perfect creation, God could have forsaken Adam and Eve and started over. But he didn't. He loved them and you and me too much ***to allow any of [us] to be lost*** (Matthew 18:14), destroyed with the unbelieving and God-rejecting weeds of this world. Rather, ***he sent his one and only Son*** to redeem the world – the whole field – ***that whoever believes in him, will not perish but have eternal life.*** And on a day like today, when we give thanks for every blessing, we give thanks that we are part of the heavenly harvest of souls, that as far as God is concerned, by his grace through faith in Jesus, we have already been gathered and brought into the barn for eternity.

But give thanks, too, that you are in the world's harvest field alongside the weeds. Because even there, it is all about the barn. I know, we would much rather be isolated from the world, but instead our heavenly physician inoculates us from the world, so

that we can be in the world, empowered to share our heavenly hope with others that we all might also share the heavenly barn for eternity. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, ***We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.*** (Colossians 1:3-6)

If you have been listening to the radio or watching the news at all over the last few days, a popular topic of conversation is family dynamics at Thanksgiving and the challenges people face. With little effort, you can find “Three Ways to Make this an Easy-Breezy Holiday Season” and “10 Tips for Surviving Thanksgiving with a Dysfunctional Family.” And almost everyone advises staying off hot-button topics like politics and religion.

But considering the parable of the weeds and the wheat, we are called on to do just the opposite. For those who ***in your hearts [have] set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*** (1 Peter 3:15) Take the opportunities that present themselves (and they will present themselves) to profess the peace that permeates your heart, to express the confidence that you have to face tomorrow (and I don't mean Black Friday), and to share the spiritual strength that you find to confront your challenges, personify your priorities, and live as the new creation you have been called to be. In this way you'll ***let your light shine...that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*** (Matthew 5:16) Because when it comes to the Kingdom of God, it really is all about gathering the sheaves...into the barn...for eternity. And so we pray...

*Even so, Lord, quickly come
To your final harvest-home;
Gather all your people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified,
In your garner to abide.
Come with all your angels, come;
Raise the glorious harvest-home. Amen.*

