

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

AND ON GOD'S FARM THERE ARE SOME WEEDS . . .

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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Analysis by Fred Niedner

24 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 27 And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' 28 He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 30 Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38 the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are collected and burned up

with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!



Tacuina sanitatis (14th century) From [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Only God knows what any of us might one day yield in the way of produce. Judgment will come one day, but there are sure to be surprises. The fruits of repentance are strange and wonderful, and they can grow from any seed sown where the waters of mercy and forgiveness flow.

DIAGNOSIS: Bad Seed

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Thistle Farm Woes

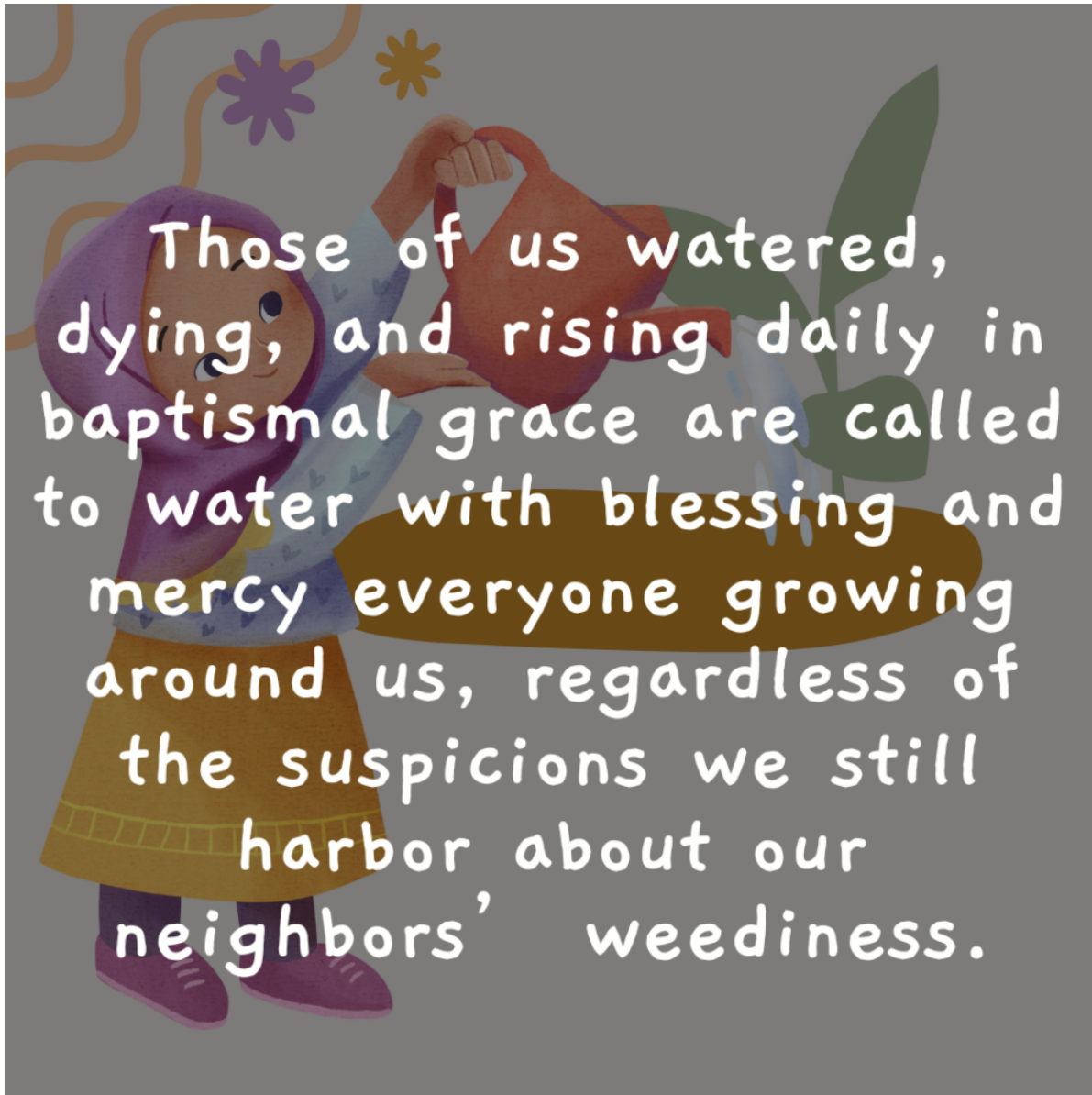
The world is a mess, and we know who's to blame. Yes, yes, every human being is made in the image of God. Each life is sacred. God doesn't make junk. But look at the way *those* people have made a mess of everything with all their nasty -isms, not to mention their patronizing arrogance, mindless greed, and shameless idolatries. Bullies and thieves thrive while gentle spirits get trampled. Thorns and thistles have taken over.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): God Has Failed; We Can Do Better

God must have sown plenty of bad seed at some point, or blown God's breath into some already toxic soil, although Jesus suggests an alternative theory. While God was sleeping, the Old Evil Foe did a bit of gardening, too, and that's how weeds have grown up in God's fields. In any case, God seems oblivious to all this trouble, but we can tell noxious weeds from the plants God wants to grow, so we have brought out our hoes and herbicides. When we take over, those useless cockleburs will be on the first truck out. To hell with the weeds!!! We may not chop them down and literally burn them, but we have the power to make their lives hell. We can mock them, shun them, own them, legally refuse to serve them, and righteously hate them, all the while singing those last six verses of Psalm 139. (Oh, how we hate the haters!)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Deadly Silence in the Killing Fields

Once we start hating, hoeing, shunning, and spraying bad seed and evildoers, where do we stop? They seem to be everywhere. It doesn't take long before we see weedy wickedness in everyone but our closest friends and intimate companions, and even among them find that familiarity with the most minor of faults breeds serious contempt. Perhaps the worst weeds of all are those who have gone soft on crime, who no longer believe in or crave justice, who show mercy to undeserving parasites and let them grow. Eventually, in unison, our practiced paranoia and our last shred of common sense tell us the same truth. All those others, including our friends and our enemies, think we're the problem. We're on *their* burn lists! Damn them anyway! Now we're all in hell. [Insert the "Gnashing of Teeth" soundtrack here.]



From Canva

PROGNOSIS: Reigning Rainwater

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Chopping Down the Landowner's Agent

We had no choice but to uproot that tireless mercy-monger who warned, "Judge not," and bade us love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, for that would make us like our Father in heaven who makes the sun rise and the rains fall on the weeds and the wheat alike. ("Amazing grace—we hate the sound!—it saved

a wretch like thee.”) He refused to judge, so we judged him, found him wanting, and hung him between earth and heaven to die with the other weeds. To our astonishment, this has put him in the strangest company—our company, the company of the damned, bound for the weed fire. And there he says what he always says: “Come with me. Together, we have even darker places to visit. We have watering to do there, and they can’t keep us out.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Watered, Growing in Son-of-Man-shine

So here we are, weeds and wheat all mingled together, as always, and we can’t tell the difference anymore because everyone gets water and light along with love, mercy, and forgiveness. It’s not our job to judge. Our work is to grow. What freedom that gives us, no longer dutybound to judge the whole world because we think God doesn’t seem up to the task. We’re at liberty now to soak up mercy and to trust that somehow we’ll bear fruit that might nourish someone somewhere, that’s all—a kind of vocation vacation.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): The Gardener’s Water Cans

Moreover, those of us watered, dying, and rising daily in baptismal grace are called to water with blessing and mercy everyone growing around us, regardless of the suspicions we still harbor about our neighbors’ weediness. Only God knows what any of us might one day yield in the way of produce. Judgment will come one day, but there are sure to be surprises. The fruits of repentance are strange and wonderful, and they can grow from any seed sown where the waters of mercy and forgiveness flow.