

Sermon: The Field of Maybes

Why does God let bad things happen to good people?

Maybe you've wondered this yourself, or you know someone who has. I hear it often from people who are looking for help when they've reached the end of their rope, when it seems like life has dealt them more trouble than anyone deserves.

It's a fair question, but it's a difficult one to answer. It's the kind of question Jesus would often use a parable to explain.

"Let both of them grow together," says the farmer in today's gospel referring to the wheat and the weeds. Is that what you do? Do you just let the weeds keep on growing? Does that make sense to you? I'll bet it didn't make sense to the workers who want to gather up and get rid of the weeds.

It doesn't make much sense to me either. I have a hard time letting both the wheat and the weeds grow together. For me, and maybe for you too, it's pretty simple. Wheat is good. Weeds are bad. Wheat feeds and nourishes my life. I have often felt that weeds take up space and choke life.

So, what do we do if we spot a weed coming up right there in the third pew? Well, we might ask, is it doing anything? Does it really matter? Is it a clear and present danger? Not really. Well, then leave it alone, then. It might get converted and bear fruit. After all, isn't that what happened to us?

A weed might even teach us something! I learned some of my best lessons from people who, frankly, I often thought we would have been better off without! So, it's risky for me to call them weeds and to try and uproot them. In fact, a weedy bloke I once judged is now a minister who has preached the world over and had a profound effect on people! Who am I to judge!?

Several times, over the last month, I have looked at my front flower bed that is full of flowers and bushes, but there are also several weeds. At least I think they are weeds. I know I didn't plant them, but the squirrels are quite happy to move things around.

And these days there are so many pretty weeds, it is hard to tell if it is a weed or a flower (or a little of both).

I don't do gardening at the best of times, and with my poor back and tender knees, I leave the gardening up to someone I pay to do the work. She is busy right now and can't get to clearing out the front bed and laying down some fresh mulch.

And maybe that's the point Jesus is making. We often don't know. It's sometimes difficult to distinguish the wheat from the weeds, whether they're in the garden of our front yard or the garden of our life.

I wonder what's growing in the garden of your life today. What are you classifying as wheat? And what are you classifying as weeds? When you look back on your life have you ever been wrong about which was which? Have you ever changed your mind about what is wheat and what is a weed? Sometimes it's just not as clear cut as we think it is or would like it to be.

Today's parable reminds me of an ancient Chinese story. It goes something like this.

Once upon a time there was a farmer who lost a horse. It ran away. His neighbors came that evening and said, "That's unfortunate." And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the horse returned and brought with it seven wild horses. The neighbors came back and said, "That's great, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses when he was thrown and broke his leg. Again, the neighbors came to the farmer and said, "Well, that's too bad, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the conscription officers came looking for people for the army but they rejected the farmer's son because he had a broken leg. The neighbors came around that evening and said, "Isn't that wonderful?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

Is that wheat growing in your garden? Maybe. Or is it a weed? Maybe. Is that wheat growing in the garden of another? Maybe. Or is it a weed? Maybe.

I wish life was as simple as weeds *or* wheat. I wish it was as easy as getting on my knees and pulling some weeds. But it's not. I have wheat *and* weeds growing in the garden of my life. I suppose you do too.

Increasingly, however, I'm finding my life to be an intertwined and complicated maybe.

It's so easy and tempting to categorize events, experiences, others, even parts of ourselves as either wheat or weeds. Listen to the rhetoric of our politicians, read the posts on social media, pay attention to your opinions and judgments of yourself and others. It's usually either wheat or weeds and we're pretty darn sure which is which. Haven't you done that? I have.

That's what the workers are doing in today's parable. They want to pull some weeds. They are sure they can tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds. But the weeds referenced in the parable aren't just ordinary weeds. It's what is sometimes called false wheat. It grows alongside wheat and it looks like wheat. Its roots and the roots of the wheat intertwine. You can't really tell the difference until both plants mature. Until then, it's a maybe.

That's why the farmer tells the workers, "In gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let them both grow together." The farmer knows that with maturity the workers will see the difference between the wheat and the weeds. And I'm not talking about the maturity of the plants only. I'm also talking about the maturity of the workers, your maturity and mine. Haven't there been times when you said or thought, "I wish I knew then what I know now"?

With maturity our seeing changes. We have the benefit of more experience, a deeper understanding, and greater wisdom. And the world today sure could use more of that. So could I. What about you?

So, what would it be like and what would it take to live more in the maybe of life than in the separation of wheat and weeds? What if maybe is what holds the door open for the future?

Maybe keeps us from claiming to know more than we really do or can know. It's slow to make a final judgment or conclusion. It asks us to be willing to be surprised and live with curiosity.

It offers others and ourselves the benefit of the doubt. It allows time for growth, change, and new possibilities.

Maybe it keeps our hearts soft and our eyes open.

Maybe is a field of possibilities and hope. Maybe it's a field of wheat. Maybe it's a field of weeds. Maybe tomorrow will be better. Maybe tomorrow will be worse.

I don't know but I want to show up and find out, don't you? I want to give life a chance. I want to give you and others a chance. I want to give myself a chance. I want to give God a chance.

I don't want to be too quick to assume that I know who or what are the wheat and who or what are the weeds.

What if you, I, and this congregation, were to live in the tension between the wheat and the weeds? Is it wheat or a weed? Yeah, maybe. And what would it be like to offer your maybe to the world, others, and yourself? I wonder what possibilities and hope that might offer.

When you look at the garden of your life today – all the things that look like wheat, all the things that look like weeds, all the things you are unclear about – what's the maybe for you? What's the maybe you need today? To whom or what do you need to say, "Maybe"? Amen