

## What About the Weeds?

Romans 8:12-25 & Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43  
Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church  
1001 W. Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616  
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### Romans 8:12-25 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

<sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

### Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (NIV)

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

<sup>27</sup> “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ <sup>28</sup> “An enemy did this,” he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ <sup>29</sup> ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> 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, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

<sup>40</sup>“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup>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. <sup>42</sup>They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup>Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

### What About the Weeds?

According to Pastor Charles Yoost there is a well-known saying in rural areas in the late summer. The saying is this: “Make sure you lock your car doors when you go into church.”

Now in urban areas like ours we are often told to lock our cars, even in church parking lots, because something might be stolen while we are worshipping, perhaps even the car itself. But there’s an entirely different reason in rural areas. It’s just that when you come out of worship in rural areas, if you have unwittingly left your car unlocked in the late summer, you might find a big bag of zucchini in the front seat! Zucchini squash is a very healthy food, but there’s nothing that grows more abundantly than zucchini — so gardeners are constantly giving zucchini to anyone who will take them.

I thought of the abundance of zucchini when I read again this week Jesus’ parable about weeds. If there is anything that grows more abundantly than zucchini, it might be weeds. Especially if you are trying to grow a garden.

According to Jesus’ parable, a sower sowed good seed in a field, but an enemy came and sowed weeds. Later Jesus explained that the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom, and the weeds stand for all who do evil. Jesus, said “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 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. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Then He added, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Every gardener knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds. If you don’t, the weeds will choke out the good plants you want to grow. God also knows the importance of getting rid of the weeds. Now I know that many of us are uncomfortable with the idea of a God of Judgment, but sooner or later we have to answer the question: “What about the weeds?”

The most infamous of the Nazi death camps was the one at Dachau, Germany. Dachau was known for its brutal treatment of prisoners, as well as the deaths of many thousands of Jews. A monument there memorializes these victims of Nazi terror.

Alongside this monument is a series of exhibits depicting various Nazi methods of annihilating the Jews — the wretched detention camps, the extermination ovens, the mass graves. There is also a huge sign at Dachau which proclaims in French, German, Russian and English: “Never Again!” That is the purpose of the exhibit — to remind us of the terrible deeds that were done at Dachau so that we keep thundering to every generation, “Never Again! Never Again!”

## HUMAN EVIL IS A CONTINUING REALITY IN OUR WORLD.

We see it on every continent. We recoil at the idea of the judgment of God, but what about the weeds? What about the evil within the hearts of men and women — the hatred, bigotry, envy, bitterness, lust, anger, greed, etc.

A young woman in one of our public schools was asked to write an essay on Evolution. She wrote, “According to this theory man descended from the apes and has been descending ever since.” There is some truth in that little piece of humor. In our appetite for evil, human beings are still descending. Apes are not capable of the extraordinary evil to which humans will resort. So we do need to ask, “What about the weeds?”

Our concern today is not about the final judgment that Jesus describes — when the wheat and the weeds will be separated. For most of us that matter has already been settled. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...” So we will leave to God the determination of what happens to the truly depraved.

We aren’t responsible for what others do with their lives. But we are responsible for our own lives. What about the weeds in our own lives? How do we deal with those weeds — those pesky personality defects, those murky moral letdowns, those tawdry times of ethical failure that keep us from being all that God intends us to be? For, you see, God has created us to be like a beautiful garden — bearing fruit whose taste is sweet and pleasing to the taste buds and bursting forth in blossoms whose beauty is pleasing to the eye. How do we get rid of the weeds from our own hearts and become the beautiful garden Christ intends us to be?

## THE FIRST STEP IS TO RECOGNIZE HOW WEEDS GROW.

They grow without any effort on our part. No one goes out and plants a weed. No one cultivates it, waters it, sees that it gets enough sunshine.

Weeds require no labor. They just appear. Weeds remind me of that mindless bit of philosophy still so popular in our society today: “If it feels good, do it.” That is a certain recipe for failure! If we did only what felt good to us we would be physical, mental, moral and spiritual wrecks. The things worth having in life require effort, and sometimes, pain.

One of the most dangerous heresies of this sort is the idea that love is something that comes naturally. In this view of life, love is a mushy feeling. Mature people, however, understand that love is not simply a feeling; it is a commitment. Real love takes work. It involves the willingness to be there in good times or bad, for better or for worse.

That’s especially true of parenting. There was once a certain man who wouldn’t let his children attend church. His rationale? He wanted them to wait until they were old enough to decide for themselves. His pastor came by one day and said he wanted to take the man to his own home to see his

garden. When they walked into the garden, it was full of weeds, which were choking out his squash, beans and tomatoes. The man said: “This is a pitiful excuse for a garden!”

To which the pastor replied: “I just wanted to wait until the vegetables had a chance to decide for themselves what they wanted to do!” Looking after a garden takes work. So does looking after a marriage, or being a responsible parent.

Beware of anything in life that requires no commitment on your part, no effort, no inconvenience. You are probably dealing with a weed. For example, the sinister danger behind gambling is the illusion that great riches can be yours with little effort. It is also part of the psychology of drugs. Why face your problems? You can escape from them with an artificial euphoria by simply taking a tiny pill. Illicit sex can have the same appeal. A few hours in a motel is different than having to live with someone day in and day out. How do you get rid of the weeds? You begin by recognizing how weeds grow. They grow without effort.

YOU GET RID OF WEEDS, IN THE SECOND PLACE, BY RECOGNIZING WHAT IT TAKES TO GROW A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN — YOU BEGIN WITH A MENTAL IDEA OF WHAT YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE.

You map it out in your mind’s eye. You visualize the finished product — the roses and the begonias, the dogwoods and the maples, the hedges and the walkways.

Do you have that same clear-cut vision concerning your life? There are some people who take better care of their lawns than they do their lives. Successful people almost always have a vision of what they hope to achieve in life.

The story’s told of a skinny, scrawny African-American youngster who one day heard a coach say, “You can be what you make up your mind to be. God will help you.” Later this youngster told the coach, “I’ve decided what I want to be — the fastest man in the world.” The coach said, “Son, that’s a great dream, but there is one problem. Dreams have a way of floating high in the sky and drifting around like clouds. A dream never becomes a reality unless you have the courage to build a ladder to your dream.” He explained that his dream would take determination, dedication and discipline.

Young Jesse Owens listened to the words of that coach, and at the 1936 Olympics in Germany he established himself as the fastest man in the world. He won four gold medals and embarrassed Adolph Hitler before the world. A beautiful garden begins with a vision, a dream, an inner picture of what you want to accomplish with God’s help.

A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN ALSO REQUIRES A PLAN.

A great Quaker leader named Rufus Jones was a prolific writer. He wrote and published one book a year for over fifty years. He did this while making speeches, editing a magazine and attending to

countless additional responsibilities. Someone once asked him how he found the time to write so many books. He answered, "I wrote my books on Tuesdays."

It was a simple but effective plan: he set aside Tuesdays as his one day of the week on which he accepted no avoidable appointments. He wrote from breakfast until dark. He might be thinking about his next project all week long, but he did not put it on paper until Tuesday. He wrote on Tuesdays. By following that simple plan he left behind a great body of work.

You have heard it before because it is true: Those who fail to plan, plan to fail. That's true with churches as much as it is with businesses and individuals. Jesus talked about the foolishness of those who build towers without first sitting down and figuring the cost. Successful living requires that we give some thought to the future. We have a vision of the beautiful garden we hope to be. Now we sit down and make a plan. What would I have to do to make my dream a reality? Of course, a meaningful plan for our lives will include all of eternity.

There is an old story about a court jester who was given a wand by the nobleman he served. "Keep this," said the nobleman, "until you find a greater fool than yourself."

The jester put the wand away and kept it for many years. One day the nobleman lay dying. Calling the jester to his side he said, "I am going on a long journey." The jester asked, "Where to?" The nobleman shrugged his shoulders. "For how long?" asked the jester. "Forever," replied the nobleman weakly. "What provisions have you made for your journey?" asked the jester. "None," answered the nobleman. "Then," said the jester, "take this," handing the nobleman his wand. "For you are a greater fool than I."

A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN REQUIRES A VISION, A PLAN AND A COMMITMENT TO CULTIVATE IT AS LONG AS NECESSARY.

I like what Tom Landry, the legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys once said. It went something like this: "I have a job to do that is not very complicated, but it is difficult: to get a group of men to do what they don't want to do so they can achieve the one thing they have wanted all of their lives."

Isn't that a great statement? Cultivating a garden requires those daily little tasks that are, perhaps, a pain. But you do them because you can envision the beauty and the bounty that awaits you. That, of course, is what disciplined living is all about. We talked about discipline a couple of weeks ago. Some people do not understand the nature of discipline. They think of it as mindless devotion to meaningless activity.

I chuckled when I heard about a Marine Sergeant who was trying to enforce Marine discipline on a group of young recruits. He decided to try the modern psychological idea that you should always explain why. He was heard yelling at a squadron of green recruits: "Take a look at yourselves! Shoes not shined properly, haircuts terrible, ties crooked, and whiskers like you haven't shaved in a week. Suppose some country suddenly declared war on us! What would we do?"

Well, I doubt that having shoes well shined and hair trimmed neatly will help you much in battle. But the discipline involved in the daily life of a marine will make a difference in the outcome of a battle. Disciplined living is not following a mindless routine. To the man or the woman who has caught a vision of life's boundless possibilities, it is the application of a plan.

Isn't it time you got rid of the weeds in your life? Weeds are the enemy of a beautiful garden — whether that garden is a good marriage, or the sanctity of your body, or your relationship with your children, or your progress in your profession, or your relationship with God. Weeds require no effort, but they can choke out the work of a lifetime. A beautiful garden, on the other hand, requires vision, planning and discipline. But the prize is worth the price!

**SO HEED JESUS' WARNINGS ABOUT WEEDS. KEEP THE WEEDS OUT OF YOUR LIFE.**

A farmer was out spraying in his garden. A certain beetle was threatening his crops. His little girl was upset with her father killing all those helpless little bugs. Her father patiently explained that their family was dependent on their garden and the beetles could literally cause them to starve. "You see," said her father, "I'm not so much opposed to beetles. It's just that I am for our garden."

That is God's attitude toward weeds. It's not so much that God hates weeds. It's that He loves us so much that He does not want anything in our lives that might drag us down and take away our joy. Successful living requires us to get rid of the weeds and to turn our lives into a beautiful garden for God.

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