

The Parable of the Weeds

Scripture: Matthew 13:24 – 30 & 36 – 43

June 14th, 2020

In Mark's Gospel, it says – *Jesus did not say anything to them without using a parable.*

The phrase 'Once Upon a Time' might be the most powerful four words ever spoken. Those four words 'Once Upon a Time' maybe the most powerful words in the entire world. Some of my earliest memories as a boy contain a variation of those four words.

The children's Bible we purchased for our boys always seemed to start each Bible story with 'Once Upon a Time'. Our sons would sit in their beds expectantly as my wife would read them a story. Each story was filled with interesting people and the God who loved them. Those Bible stories became a lens for how they would look at the world.

Do you know who was the greatest story teller of all time? Jesus of Nazareth! Jesus knew we all carry inside of us a love for stories. A parable is a story and Jesus used parables to communicate his good news.

For instance in our parable today - Once Upon a Time a man scattered seeds. Through this parable we have an opportunity to understand more thoroughly the God who loves us.

The first part of our scripture reading – Matthew 13:24 – 30 is the parable of the weeds. The second part of our scripture reading explains the parable of the weeds.

Johnny Appleseed is a figure in American folklore who went about planting apple seeds across the frontier of America. Actually, the legend of Johnny Appleseed is taken from an actual man named – John Chapman. John Chapman fought in the Revolutionary War and did indeed head west after the war planting apple nurseries and orchards in Ohio and Indiana. John's apple trees transformed the frontier from pioneer land into homesteads. John Chapman was a Christian man who is remembered today in many households with a mealtime prayer that is sung: Oh, the Lord is good to me,

And so I thank the Lord, For giving me the things I need,
The sun and the rain and the apple seed.

The Lord is good to me.

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen!

The sower in Jesus' parable introduces new seed to the ground. He intrudes in the natural order of things. He chooses the ground to seed. He prepares the ground for the seeds and he blesses the ground with seed. The planting is intentional and specific.

God plants His Word just that way. God introduces new seed – His Word – to our being. God intrudes in the natural order of life. God chooses the person to seed His Word. God prepares the person for His Word and he blesses the person with seed – His Word. The planting is intentional and specific!

The Word yields amazing results in our lives. The Word yields new identity in our life. The Word has purpose and impacts our life with Jesus Christ. We need to sing out loud – *Oh, the Lord is good to me!*

The literature of many cultures has the story of an individual who sleeps for years and wakes up to a different world. In 1818 Washington Irving wrote such a story which gives us Rip Van Winkle. Rip Van Winkle was a lazy henpecked husband who sleeps for 20 years and wakes up to discover he has missed the Revolutionary War. He is surprised by what he sees.

In Jesus' parable of the weeds, while workers sleep, an enemy sows weeds in a wheat field. Clearly the enemy is out to ruin the farmer's harvest. The workers are surprised when they see the weeds growing alongside the wheat and they even question their boss. They wonder – Did he misread the seed bag's content? Does the farmer not know how to farm and plant wheat?

Throughout the New Testament, the followers of Jesus are cautioned to stay awake and alert. In the Garden of the Olive Press, Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray lest they yield to temptation. They fell asleep and awoke to a violent and disturbing arrest of Jesus.

Lazy Christians are vulnerable to attack. Exhausted Christians must be cautious not to fall asleep and wake up to find their relationship with Christ sabotaged. Sleepy Christians must stay awake so that their faith is not compromised.

In the parable of the weeds, the dirty deed was done in the dark of night. The enemy dropped his bad seed and went away. Maybe he was not out to hurt the farmer. Perhaps he was simply a destructive person or an agricultural vandal. The ground never saw it coming because the ground is as dumb as dirt! The ground received bad seed the way it took any seed – good or bad. The sleeping workers missed it too. No one saw the enemy.

What stands out to me about the enemy is his invisibility. Only the weeds give it away that he was there. The farmer and workers are clueless. The master has to tell the clueless workers where the weeds came from.

It may still be a secret to some that Satan is a wily and formidable enemy. In the Gospels, Satan left Jesus after the temptations in the wilderness and Satan waited until an opportune time. That time came in the Garden where Jesus again faced the dark night and had to tell his workers, his disciples, to watch and pray over and over again.

The word 'UNTIL' is a hard word. It means we are in the middle of something, it means we are in-between, and we have to wait with patience for a coming event – UNTIL! So the master in Jesus' parable of the weeds tells the workers that the weed and the wheat will grow side by side until the harvest. Then there will be a reckoning. Then the weeds will be bundled up and burned. The wheat will go into the barn.

The weeds will be burned – the wheat will be stored. The master tells the workers that this will not happen until harvest.

The word 'UNTIL' is also a hopeful word. It means there is still time for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to turn weed into wheat. We can still impact the world as God uses our witness for his benefit. We can still impact the world with our personal kindness. We can still impact the world with our generous acts of service for eternal purposes.

For us, the modern day Christians, the word 'UNTIL' is a span of a lifetime. We only have so much time to leave a legacy of witness. The harvest will soon come, but until it does. We have work to do!

God does not need our good works but the world truly does in this time of a world pandemic.

Let us pray:

O God, your Son is the Wonderful Counselor and the Mighty God. Give us creativity in the ways in which we share Your love with a world that still slows down to hear a story.

Lord, scatter your life giving seeds of your Word across our lives. Spirit of God, wake us up to the dangers which threaten our discipleship.

Lord, in the darkness of temptation teach us to watch and pray. Let us not fall asleep in your service. And, Lord Jesus, until we die or until You come again, make us a faithful witness to your glory. AMEN.