



'Worship at home' Sunday July 23rd 2023



We come to worship God,
who we find in the holy spaces
and the ordinary places of our lives,
and who knows and loves each of us, just as we are.

Psalm 139:1-2, 23-24

*Lord, you have examined me
and you know me. You know
everything I do; from far away
you understand all my
thoughts. Examine me, O
God, and know my mind; test*

*me, and discover my
thoughts. Find out if there is
any evil in me and guide me in
the everlasting way.*

Good News Bible

Opening

We've come to worship God,
who loved us before we were yet born,
who knows us even better than
we know ourselves,
whose presence never leaves us,
and whose love for us never ceases.
This is our God. Let's worship!

~ adapted from Christine Longhurst <https://re-worship.blogspot.com>



What do you understand the kingdom of heaven to be like?

Matthew chapter 13 records a series of parables told by Jesus illustrating aspects of the kingdom of heaven. Like many of Jesus' stories, these parables provoke a number of questions, and there is often an unexpected twist that invite the hearer to see things differently.

"...one mark of many of Jesus' parables is that they have a twist that would have been totally unexpected to his hearers, and disturbed their assumptions about the way things are..."

-Bible study Parables: Reliving the Stories of Jesus

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus told them another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. One night, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, then the weeds showed up. The man's servants came to him and said, "Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?" "It was some enemy

who did this," he answered. "Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?" they asked him. "No," he answered, "because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn." "

Good News Bible

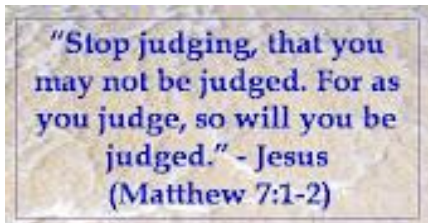
What do you hear in this story?

What might it be about?

How do you respond?



I have heard it said that a weed is only a plant in the wrong place. The leaves of dandelions are used in salads, sandwiches and specialty tea, but the plant chokes out other seedlings. A paddock of purple Salvation Jane can look magnificent but is deadly to livestock and horses. Blackberries are delicious to eat but their prickly branches soon get out of control.



We might hear this as a story of judgement, and find ourselves trying to determine who is wheat, and who are weeds. However, we hear Jesus' words: "let the wheat and the weeds both grow

together until harvest." We can be quick to make distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, wanted and unwanted.

People are not all good, nor all bad, and that judgement is not ours to make.

Weeds can be difficult to distinguish from wheat. The author of Matthew is likely referring to darnel, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and real wheat is evident only when the plants mature and the ears appear. The ears of the real wheat are heavy and will droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight. The two plants become entwined, and it is impossible to pull out one without the other. Perhaps we need each other in order to grow stronger.



I wonder if the twist in this story was to teach us **not** to judge. We cannot tell the weeds from the wheat; we cannot tell what is in another's heart; but we can ask God to examine us, to help us to see our own weeds, to grow our wheat and to guide us in the everlasting way.

*Search me O God
and know my anxious heart.
Behind me and before me,
you lay your hand upon me.*

*Where might I hide
to flee you tender touch?
No darkness or the ocean
hides me from your devotion.*

*You know my every need,
You know my thoughts,
my joy, my crying,*

*God your wisdom
ways surround me
at my birth, my dying.*



*Woven by you
deep in my mother's womb.
That moment of conception
you knew my life's direction.*

*Search me O God
and purify my ways.
O teach me love surpassing,
guide me in all that's lasting.*

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Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,

you plant each of us like seeds in the same field
and together we are nourished and nurtured by the sun.
We sway in the wind and are refreshed by the rain.
We are blessed by the knowledge that you want us
to grow towards what you call us to be.



When we deprive others of that same opportunity,
forgive us.

When we want to uproot those whom we believe
do not belong in our part of the field,
forgive us.

When we label others as good or bad
rather than accept them for who they are,
forgive us.

When we are reluctant to acknowledge
that we ourselves are a mixture of weeds and wheat,
forgive us.

When we are afraid to look into the fields of our own lives
to see what is growing there,
forgive us.

O God, you know us inside and out, through and through.
You search us out and lay your hand upon us.
You know what we are going to say even before we speak.
So we pray that you will help us to reach out to the uprooted and
rejected, the lonely and the outcast, and to develop and grow the
good in ourselves, in others and in the world. **Amen**

- Moira Laidlaw [Liturgies Online](#)

Closing

Go in peace, peace which is the gift of an all-loving God.
And may our feet be placed in holy ground,
Our minds be guided by Christ Jesus
And our loves be inspired and uplifted
by the gracious Spirit of God. Amen

- Together in Worship and Praise year A 4