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Growing Together: Lessons from the Wheat and the Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

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 servants of the Sower came and said to him, ‘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 servants 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. ’”

When I read today's Scripture, I immediately thought about kids. The promise of kids and the patience needed to "trust the process", even when we can't see the final results of our efforts.

For more than 30 years, I've spent my life around children—first as a teacher and now as an elementary school principal. I've worked with thousands of students.

Some came to school excited to learn. Some came carrying things no child should ever have to carry. Some struggled to read. Some struggled to make friends. Some pushed every limit you could imagine. And some just needed ONE person to believe in them.

If there's one thing those years have taught me, it's this:

Kids are still becoming who they're going to be.

That's why this parable resonated so much with me.

The servants looked across the field, saw weeds, and wanted to pull them out right away. They wanted to fix the problem.

But the Sower stopped them.

He knew something they didn't.

Sometimes, if you act too quickly, you end up hurting the very thing you're trying to protect.

I've seen that happen with children.

It's easy to decide too soon who a child is.

A student has a rough year, and suddenly they're "the behavior kid."

A child struggles with reading, and people quietly lower their expectations.

A teenager makes one bad decision, and adults start wondering what kind of person they'll become.

But that's not the whole story. I've been doing this long enough to know better.

A young boy comes to mind. He moved to South Jefferson Elementary from a rough neighborhood in upstate New York. He was being raised by a single Mom, who was extremely overwhelmed by life. His father was incarcerated, and this first grader had a chip on his shoulder the minute he arrived at our school that first day. Obviously, his bookbag was not filled with crayons or #2 pencils. Instead, he carried disappointment, childhood trauma and a whole lot of anger through our doors that day. When I introduced myself to him, he told me, "I flipped desks over in my old school" and stared at me, to gauge my reaction. I simply told him that we didn't do that here at South Jefferson and proceeded to show him to his new classroom. I won't sugarcoat the story, to tell you that we had a Hallmark moment right then and there, and all was well after that first meeting.

He pushed every button, challenged every adult, and created an intimidating persona on the playground that scared most of our students. But not one adult in our school gave up or gave in. He struggled and we persevered. He pushed and we kept coming back. When he left elementary school, I worried about him. I knew that middle school would be rough for him, and I was fearful that he would push too hard, and the world would push back harder. I thought about him often and wondered how he was doing. I didn't see him again until last year, when he showed up at our school out of the blue. He is a young adult now, but I recognized him right away. He wanted to come to visit, to see his former teachers and to let me know that even though he didn't act like it at the time, he WAS listening and he HEARD us. He was excited to share how he was doing and he seemed happy. He visited his former teachers, and I watched them hug him, welcome him back, tell him how proud they were of him....

Just like him, I've also watched children who couldn't read become students who loved books.

I've watched quiet kids find their voice.

I've watched students who struggled with Math suddenly volunteer to teach others how to solve the problem.

I've watched children who challenged every adult around them grow into kind and awesome people.

The child standing in front of us today isn't finished.

They're still growing. And still learning.

And if I'm being honest...

So am I.

That's another reason I love this parable.

God isn't just talking about children in the traditional sense.

He's talking about all of us.

I'm grateful God doesn't decide who I am based on one bad season of my life.

God has been patient with me.

He's kept working on me, even when I might not be making much progress at the time.

That's the same patience we're called to show the children in our lives.

Now, that doesn't mean we ignore unacceptable behavior.

Believe me—I spend plenty of time helping children understand right from wrong and that life is full of consequences.

Kids need boundaries.

They need accountability.

But they also need adults who refuse to give up on them.

Because correction without love rarely changes a heart. Or a behavior.

Children grow when they know they're safe.

When they know someone believes in them.

When they know one mistake isn't the end of their story.

You don't have to work in a school to be that person.

Some of the best teachers a child will ever have never stand in front of a classroom.

They're parents.

Grandparents.

Aunts and uncles.

Sunday studio and nursery volunteers.

Choir members.

Friends. Neighbors.

Every time you learn a child's name...and use it.

Every time you truly listen to them...every smile you give, just for them.

Every conversation after church...

Those moments matter more than we realize.

Children are paying attention.

They're learning what kindness looks like.

They're learning what forgiveness looks and feels like.

They're deciding whether the church feels like a place where they belong, too.

At school, one of my favorite things is watching growth that almost sneaks up on you.

One day a child can't tie their shoes. One morning, they walk in, proudly wearing the shoes they tied themselves.

A student who hated reading suddenly asks if they could take another book home from the library.

The child who never raised a hand in class suddenly has something to say.

Those moments don't happen because of one great lesson.

They happen because someone kept showing up.

Day after day.

With patience.

With encouragement.

With hope. And allowing them to grow.

Isn't that how God works with us?

He keeps showing up.

He keeps loving us.

He keeps helping us grow.

As a church family, we have the honor to do the same for the children around us.

We don't have to know how their story ends.

We just have to love them well while they're growing.

Our job isn't to decide the difference between wheat or weeds.

Our job is to love people the way God loves us.

So today, I hope we'll look at every child in our lives a little differently.

Not just for who they are today...

But for who they might become.

Let's be the adults who speak hope.

Who offer grace.

Who believe in second chances.

Who don't give up too soon.

Because sometimes the greatest gift we can give a child isn't fixing them.

It's loving them long enough to watch God do the growing.

Let the Church say "Amen".