

Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2026 – Proper 11
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Genesis 28:10-19a
Psalm 139:1-11,22-23
Romans 8:12-25
Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Weeding.

That's what the servants in today's parable ask of their master.

"Do you want us to go weed the field?"

It's a difficult decision.

The weeds might choke some plants.

Then again pulling the weeds will pull up some of the wheat.

A friend of mine once told me the story.

He thought he'd be helpful one spring.

He decided to go out and weed his wife's garden early one Saturday. He worked all morning long.

When she came home and found him on his knees,
he looked up with pride to meet her frown.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"You've dug up all my perennials."

That's the problem.

How do you know what's a weed?

How do you decide what to do?

I mean, when you're faced with a decision, how do you decide?

It could be as simple as, whether to buy a new shirt or blouse;

or whether to follow the advice of that lizard

and change insurance companies?

Some of us just act. I want the shirt. I'll save money, do it.

Some of us make lists of the pros and cons, and then weigh the cost.

Some of us ask the advice of those we trust.

Some of us pray.

I remember a time when my father's father,

the man for whom I'm named, was trying to decide

whether to attend the funeral of his sister's husband in a distant state. He looked for his answer in his dreams.

He'd pray about it and then go to sleep.

I remember he told me,

"I dreamed about the funeral and I wasn't there,

so I'm not supposed to go."

How do we decide the matters of life and death?

When I was a chaplain at Presbyterian Hospital
I encountered many people at various stages of cancer.
Two women come to mind.

The first woman would do anything to hang on
through the absolute worst of the chemo.
She had been hospitalized for months and suffered enormous pain. She resolutely vowed to
fight for her life till Jesus came
and welcomed her home.
She asked me to pray with her
that God would give her the patience and strength
to endure the pain.

The other woman was a minister.
She'd undergone four courses of chemo.
Her internal organs were failing,
and though her mother hounded her to undergo another round,
she decided this was as far as she could go.

She asked me to pray with her that God
would give her the patience and strength
to meet her end with dignity.

See this.

This is the head of a stalk of wheat.
The wheat kernels are held in the stalk,
and those kernels are what is milled into flour.
This is what a farmer harvests.
This is literally what Jesus was referring to
in the parable from today's gospel reading.

The farmer has prepared the ground,
plowed and fertilized
and tilled the soil before sowing the wheat.

And after the field is planted,
the farmer has to wait
for the field to grow and endure the dangers
of birds, locusts, hail, storms, and weeds.
The farmer can do a lot,
and what he does most is pray
for patience and strength and a bountiful harvest.

A bountiful harvest
is what Paul is talking about in our reading from Romans.

For Paul,
Jesus has planted a new hope for us all as heirs of God's kingdom. Being heirs may sound a little detached – let me put it another way.

What Paul is talking about is being one of the family.
Because of Jesus, we get to join God's chosen people.
We are given the grace not just to call God – Father,
but to call God – Abba.
'That's the Hebrew equivalent of Daddy.
Not Father, Not Pappa. But Daddy.

Daddy. It means so much more.
Daddy means being three years old again
and cuddling up in Daddy's arms,
knowing we are loved and protected.
It's Daddy I called out for in the darkness
to protect me from the monsters in my dreams.
'That is our hope – that at the end it won't be a stern father
with a long white beard pointing fingers
and making judgments on what we have done with our lives,
but Daddy.

Daddy is what my mother always called her father.
He was always Daddy to her.
He was a kind and gentle man.
When my mother married my father,
as they were preparing to drive off,
he slipped her a \$20 bill and told her:
"I know you have to wait and see,
but if he isn't good to you, take the bus home."
And \$20 was a lot of money in 1945.
In today's money it'd be like handing her four \$100 bills.

We all have to wait and see.
We are the fields in which God
has planted the hopes and dreams of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are charged with caring for those fields
and nurturing the hopes and dreams of our children,
our neighbors and our selves.

'That is our task in this life:
each and every day we must work to nurture life.

As a friend of mine wrote me recently
talking about the lessons today:

Our job is to nurture the field.

Every time we help someone in need,
we nurture the field.

Every time we resist evil, and repent of our sins,
we nurture the field.

Every time we proclaim by word and example
the Good News of God in Christ,
we nurture the field.

Every time we seek and serve Christ in all persons,
we nurture the field.

Every time we love our neighbors as our selves,
we nurture the field.

Every time we strive for justice and peace,
we nurture the field.

Every time we respect the dignity of another human being,
we nurture the field.

Our job is to nurture the field
and do the will of our Daddy in heaven
so that when the harvest comes,
we can all count ourselves among the sheaves of wheat.

