



**Rev. George Ragsdale**  
**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**  
**July 20, 2008**

...Let us pray. From cowardice that dares not face new truth, from laziness that is content with half truth, from arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, good Lord deliver us. Amen.

I wonder how many of you have a toaster at home? Yes, lots of toasters, and I wonder if you have a toaster, what would you do if your toaster stopped working? What would you do? You get up in the morning, you put your bread in, you press the button, you wait for those coils to heat up and nothing happens. What would you do if your toaster stopped working? You'd probably do what I would do if that happened, I would take the toaster and put it in the trash and go and buy a new one. Now it's not always been that way. My grandmother, if her toaster stopped working, she would have taken it to the repair shop and she would have waited for a few days, maybe even a few weeks, for that toaster to be fixed and then she would have gone back and picked it up. Everything could be repaired, everything was worth repairing, everything was worth waiting to have repaired. But today we live in what some people have called a disposable culture, a disposable culture. If it's broken, don't fix it, just throw it away. You need it now, we need it now, we can't wait. Throw what's broken, what's useless, away and get a new one, NOW! I suspect most of us are like the landowner in this parable that Jesus tells in Matthew's gospel. We all have our fields, we have our lives and we are in control of our lives. We call the shots, we make the decisions, if something breaks, we fix it, we take care of it, we replace it. If there's a mess, we make sure it, it gets cleaned up, if there are weeds growing in our lives, we take care of them.

I just moved into a new house a few weeks ago. I've never been a homeowner before, I grew in parsonages, I've lived in a parsonage for the last few years and more or less the church has always supervised what goes on in our yard. Well I was out in the yard and I was walking around in the back and I began to realize that there are weeds everywhere, there are weeds in the pine needles, there are weeds in the mulch, there are weeds in the flower beds. There are weeds everywhere and these weeds really began to get the best of me, they really got to me. What do we do when we see something that's wrong? What do we do when something's out of place, when something's messy, what do we do? We fix it. So I rushed inside, got the keys, went in the car and drove down to Lowe's and found the biggest bottle of Roundup I could possibly find and I went home to kill the weeds. The matter of getting weeds out of my backyard is probably not as important as getting weeds out of a farmer's field.

I lived in Yadkin County, a rural county in the northern part of our State, and there are lots of farmers there, and they always wanted to take the pastor to see their gardens, these huge vegetable gardens, and many times I remember we'd be walking along and they'd be showing this vegetable and that vegetable and they would inevitably bend over to pull something out of the ground. This would happen all the time, they'd spot it and they'd pull it

up, they were so vigilant about the weeds. You have to be vigilant about the weeds, you have to take care of them because it's your crop, that's how you eat, that's how you survived. If there are weeds, you do something about them. If there are weeds, you pull them up, you take care of it, you take care of it NOW!

And we do this sort of thing in our world. Remember right after September 11, 2001, our President was in the National Cathedral in Washington and he stood in the pulpit and he said, "It is time, the time has come for us to rid the world of evil." We expect that sort of thing, don't we? We expect that something terrible like that happens, we expect action, we expect response, we expect it right then and there! We expect sometimes that sort of thing in the church; we come to church and expect it to be the place that's going to take care of those people and that kind of people and these people, whoever it is. The writer Anne Lamott said, "If all you get out of the Bible is that God hates the very same people you hate, you are in trouble." I think the reason for that is what Jesus is trying to get at in this parable. There's a field, a field of freshly sown wheat, they've used the best seed they could find and it's been sown and everybody goes to bed to get a good night's sleep and while they're sleeping, someone comes and there are weeds sown all through the field. And they get up and then the weeds and the wheat begin to come up and there are weeds all over the place, there are weeds everywhere, and the landowners' servants, who are really dependent on that field and they're really dependent on that landowner and on his decisions about the field for their livelihood, they come to him and they say, "Master, don't you want us to do something about these weeds?" And the landowner replies, "No, just wait, just wait. Let them grow together." Just imagine the frustration of those servants, they need a good crop if they're going to survive. They need the landowner to take care of the crop if they're going to survive.

You can imagine them looking at him and wanting to scream, "But the weeds, the weeds, you've got to do something, you've got to do it now or we're all going to perish before it's too late. You've got to pull these weeds up!" How frustrating is that response from the landowner, how frustrating! And Jesus says "This is God's way, this is God's way." It is the way of Jesus; the kingdom of Heaven is like that field of weeds and wheat sown together. We get so frustrated sometimes with God, don't we? We get frustrated, we expect God to act, we expect God to act now to rid the world of evil, to take care of this people or that people. To do something about those weeds that are growing up in the middle of the wheat. But God says, "No, wait, let them grow together." This is actually more than just frustrating, sometimes it is downright offensive. We don't know what to do with a God who does not act on our terms, we don't know what to do with a God like this, a God who is so patient, a God who says, "Just let them grow together a little while." Rowan Williams the Archbishop of Canterbury, talks about God's almightiness, God's power, and he warns us to be careful about thinking of God's almightiness, God's power in terms of what we would do if we were almighty or all powerful. Just doing whatever it is we wanted to do, whenever we wanted. What the Bible puts before us, he says, is not a record of a God who always triumphantly gets his way, but a God who gets his way by patiently, patiently struggling. To make himself clear to human beings, a God patiently struggling to make his love real to them, a God whose almighty power is more of a steady, steady swell of loving presence. Always there, always

there at the work of everything, opening the door to a future when we can see no hope. This is the way God works, calmly, patiently, steadily loving us with an unfading presence.

From the time I was about 6 months old, my life has been shaped by a woman name Ruth Churchill. Ruth was not a member of my family, she was actually hired by my parents to be my babysitter and I stayed with Ruth most afternoons, I called her Nanny. She really became like family to me, and I stayed with Nanny until I was 13 years old, every afternoon. We moved away, but I always tried to stay in touch. The older I got, Nanny would always write letters to me about every 2 weeks, you could count on a letter from her, and she would send cards to me at Christmas and on my birthday. They always came, no matter how...I was not very good at responding, I got so busy, things were happening. Nanny was always writing. Those cards, those letters kept coming. And then no matter how long it took for me to call, she always welcomed me. I could always count on the table to be full of the foods that she knew were my favorite, and she would welcome me with that same patient, steady love that had guided me for so long. Maybe you can think of someone like that in your life, someone who has shown that kind of patience, that kind of love. Someone who has heard the voice that says, "Wait, don't pull them up just yet." Someone who has heard that voice of godly patience, godly love. A patience and a love that frankly do not make a whole lot of sense, but have made all the difference in who you are and where you are today.

You know we hear this parable and we want to be the landowner, we want to be the landowner, we want to be the ones calling the shots, the ones making all the decisions, the ones doing something about the weeds. But we are not. We're just the servants called to heed the voice of the landowner that says, "Wait, don't separate the weeds from the wheat, let them grow together, just wait." And it really is a blessing to us because as the landowner points out, it is nearly impossible to tell the difference between weeds and wheat. Sometimes we may look like wheat when deep down inside something like a weed is growing and eating at us and tearing us up inside. And sometimes we may look at each other and say, "Man, he looks like a weed" when really it's a tender kernel of wheat that just needs a little more time, a little more time to grow in the knowledge and the love of God.

I don't know, if we try to take care of the weeds, we might just take care of everything, we might kill everything, kill everyone including ourselves. But we are not the landowner in this parable, we are not the landowner. God is the landowner, God is in charge in this parable and in life, we do not call the shots, thank goodness! The landowner says let them grow together. You see, the landowner God knows something about the wheat that's sown in there with those weeds. The landowner God knows that the wheat...it may not look like it, but the wheat is still growing. It's still growing and it will keep growing, God is not going to forget about the wheat, it will still be nurtured and it will still keep growing. And the landowner, God knows something about weeds. Maybe weeds don't have to be weeds forever. I think that's why Jesus spent so much time with tax collectors and sinners. The religious types, the churchy types, they looked at those people and they said, "Oh those are weeds, they need to be discarded, gotten rid of!" And Jesus, he found them and he stayed with them and he loved them and he comforted them as if to say, "Look, weeds don't have to be weeds forever." But more than all of that, the landowner God knows something about the

harvest. We don't have to worry; there is no need to worry because in the end, it will all be clear.

The righteous will shine like the sun, but for now, weeds and wheat will grow together. There is still time, God waits patiently, steady and generous, with love and grace and forgiveness. God will be God of wheat and of weeds, God loves for weeds to be transformed into wheat, and we might think that we are wheat and we might get so mad, it might drive us crazy, but God keeps on waiting, and it might be that God is waiting for us. "Don't pull them up!" Jesus says, "There's still time, there is still time, still time for me. Still time for you, don't pull them up!" He says "Just wait." I have to tell you that when I got back home with my giant 10-gallon jar of Roundup, I went out in the backyard and I found this flower bed, it was infested with weeds, There were weeds and grass growing everywhere, and I pumped it up and I had the nozzle ready to go and my wife comes running out of the house screaming, "What are you doing?" And I thought it was rather obvious, I looked at the garden and I said, "Well, there are weeds, we've got to do something about these weeds, we've got to kill them, we've got to take care of them right now, we can't wait, it's got to be done." And Courtney, she smiled and she looked at me and she said, "George, there are day lilies in this flower bed and if you spray those weeds, you're going to kill the day lilies, you're going to kill everything that's there."

I don't really know what a day lily is. I'm color blind. I can't tell the difference between a blade of grass and a day lily to save my life! But you know what? Sure enough, 2 weeks went by and that flower bed looked horrible, it looked awful. The grass was up to my waste, it looked awful. But then last weekend, there were these beautiful orange blossoms that began to pop out all over, beautiful flowers, tender, fragile flowers, incredible colors. I went out there, and I was standing there in front of that flower bed and I just began to think to myself, "Gosh, I am sure glad I waited. I'm sure glad I didn't just come out here with the Roundup and spray everything and kill it all."

Let anyone with ears listen.