

So in Matt 13 Jesus is standing on the beach teaching the people. The crowd gets so big that he runs out of beach to stand on. He gets in a boat and [Peter's boat] and faces the crowd on shore speaking to a beach full of people- a sort of beachy amphitheater.

Jesus tells a story to create a picture of the Kingdom of God. He describes a farmer broadcasting seed in his field. The seed falls everywhere: the path, rocky soil, weedy soil and good rich soil- *with only the good soil producing a crop of value.*

Later on the twelve ask about **parables in general** and what the soil story was about. Jesus explains **the soils represent different sorts of people** -three in which the seed's growth is hindered and one in which the message of the Kingdom grows and produces fruit.

While only the one sort of soil produces a decent crop, it's obvious **these soils** [people] **are all in the same field.** Which begs the question: "What is to be the relationship between the good soil and the not-so-good soils?" Should we allow them to mix? Maybe we should build walls to keep the sowers seed from flying beyond the bounds of the good soil? Should we get rid of all the bad soils from the field- force it to be good soil? We don't want to "waste" good Kingdom seed on just "any" soil, do we?

As a child it was important to me that the foods on my plate did not touch. The corn stays with the corn. The tater tots have their own quadrant and the chicken leg stands alone with clear aiseways between them all so one food is not tainted by getting any of the other food on it.

With food, as a child, I thought in terms of isolation for the sake of purity.

**The first century Jew was also prone to think in terms of isolation for the sake of purity** -whole life, whole socio-religious isolation- separating themselves from the pagan cultures that surrounded them to maintain religious purity- No contamination from the unclean.

And, from the giving of the Law until the time of Jesus, separation for the sake of purity [holiness] was God's intention for the Jewish people. Listen...

Deut. 7:1 ¶ When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations — the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you — 2 and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. 3 Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. 5 This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. 6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

They were not to mix, marry or in any way mingle with other nations- They were to isolate themselves for the sake of maintaining the purity of their relationship with God.

[Sometimes they were successful at this, other times less so, mostly due to whether their leaders were faithful to God or not.] In any case **Isolation** was Israel's intention [Essenes].

At the same time, First Century Israelites were also looking forward to a Messiah- a God-anointed Kingly figure. They hoped for him because he would bring about **a powerfully renewed Kingdom of Israel that would DOMINATE all peoples and nations**. With the leadership of David and the wealth & wisdom of Solomon this One, would, by the power of God, elevate every Jew to superiority over all the nations. That expected domination appears in places like Is 60:

2 “For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. 3 “ Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising....

5 “Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. 6 “A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD....

12 “For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, And the nations will be utterly ruined....14 “The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And they will call you the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel....

21 “Then all your people *will be* righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified. 22 “The smallest one will become a clan, And the least one a mighty nation.

From this side of the cross and resurrection we see Isaiah 60 as a picture of a future world put right by the power of God. But the Israelites understood it to mean a promised God-anointed King raising Israel up to dominate the world.

**So cue the arrival of Jesus, who shows no signs of ISOLATION or DOMINATION.** Jesus is Messiah and God in the flesh, but unlike Jewish messiahs we might hear about today, cloistered away from prying eyes, amongst the orthodox faithful; or some child identified as holy by an eastern religion kept secreted away by handlers who do all the holy one's speaking for him, **Jesus is out and about with ALL the people:** the respectable and disreputable, the healthy and the sick, the well-to-do and the down-and-out, the pure and the impure, the upright and the outcaste- Jews and unclean gentiles [Jesus & The Apostates].

If Jesus is the best, blackest, richest soil, He's shoveling himself all amongst the weedy, rocky and hardpacked soils [amendment]. The perfect Son of God came and lived among the sons & daughters of men walking, working, eating, sleeping, talking, sweating, laughing, crying and loving with them all. **The incarnation undercuts isolation!** He is “God *with...us*”.

**AND instead of arriving as conquering King to dominate the world, Jesus –** Messiah and God in the flesh- **arrived as a peasant child** born to an unwed couple, grew up to be a tradesman and itinerant preacher –with no traditional education. He bunked with friends or slept on the ground. He lived in poverty and was -as our brother pointed out last week- homeless during his ministry. He healed and fed and loved and served the

weakest, most broken of his world. And, for it, he was beaten whipped and crucified. So much for the hoped-for Messianic domination.

### The incarnation undercuts domination.

The King came to live a life of service alongside fallen humans. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was “at hand”- present. And Where the King is, there’s the Kingdom. And so to those seeking to isolate and those wanting to dominate. Jesus told this story. 24 ..."The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

By definition Parables are a simple story from everyday life. Everyone understands the annoying prolific, unstoppable nature of weeds in the Garden. I know weeds. You know weeds. Jesus first century agricultural audience knew weeds.

And, typically, Parables illustrate a single idea or concept. So as we look at parables we want to stand back and take in the big picture, the central point being illustrated.

*So a man bought good seed. His laborers prepared the field and planted it with the wheat. But an enemy came in the night -stealthy and malicious- and planted the field with the seed of a weed called **bearded darnel** [lolium temulentum]. It is botanically very close to wheat. When the two plants sprout you can't tell them apart. The differences don't show up until the plants are significantly mature and by then the roots are utterly intertwined. **Jesus audience would know all this.**- nothing surprising.*

*The laborers report the bad news to the landowner and offer to rush right back out there and pull out the offending weeds. They are poised, awaiting his direction.*

**This is, in fact, the story's climax,** the peak of the action, the place where the meaning lies, the place of the story-teller's dramatic pause!

**WHAT WILL THE LANDOWNER'S CHOICE BE?**

**The fate of the entire future harvest hangs on his choice.** And, keep in mind, Jesus audience knew the weed in question and its relationship to the wheat.

Most of his crowd would know the right answer. Does he? Is he foolish or wise?

28...The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?'

29 "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.

**30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest;**

He is wise. He knows the right answer! Separating them now will damage the wheat

and, most important, diminish the harvest. The landowner [Son of man] declares: they must be allowed to grow together. **Let both grow together until the Harvest.**

Later, mixed among some other parables, Jesus will explain the parable to the Disciples with an emphasis on the “harvest/judgment” piece of the story. But in the parable itself, the harvest is not the big point of the story. As important as it is, the harvest is not the focus of the parable. The harvest is the result of the Farmer’s wise choice. ***The parable’s central point is about the composition of the field as determined by the Master:*** Let both grow together until the Harvest.

This is a surprising picture of the Kingdom of God. For the time being, the Kingdom of God would not dominate the world. Nor would it isolate itself from the world. Until the harvest the Kingdom of God would be integrated throughout the Kingdom of the world: wheat & weeds growing together for the sake of the best possible harvest.

One preacher puts it this way: “...during this [Church] age, **God is against all Christian attempts to create a religiously pure society**” [Gary Delashmatt].

**God wants the wheat among the weeds.** And the parable indicates that this is for the good of the harvest. The decision to let them grow together was to insure that in the end the *greatest possible crop could be harvested.* We know God wants this!

In 1Tim2:4 God is described as one... 4 who desires all [men] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And Peter addresses those saying: what’s taking God so long to finish up this harvest, when he says: 2Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

The nature of the Kingdom of God is that until Jesus returns it will fearlessly exist and grow and mix and mingle and dance its way through the kingdom of the world in hopes of redeeming as many as possible. Jesus’ lesson says God’s intention is for Followers of Jesus to live life side by side with those who choose not follow Jesus- to share the good & bad of existence **for the sake of a greater harvest.**

God becoming a human creates a connection between Jesus and all people throughout history. Jesus prayed for the Disciples [us], telling God he was sending them [us] **into the world** though they were not **of the world** (John 17:16-18). Just like them, as His followers, bearers of His Spirit, being the body of Christ on earth, we are sent [like Jesus] into the world to love and serve it.

We’re to live in the world like people who love God and love what God loves. And this is to be the way of it until Jesus comes again. Paul, a stickler for holy living, told the Corinthians 1Cor. 5:9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with immoral people — 10 not at all

meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

**Jesus said...**

Matt. 5:13 ¶ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** **In the same way, let your light shine before men,** that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

But being salt and light is hard. It’s easier to revert to the separation of the Israelites. -the ghettoization of Christianity. It’s easier to loudly denounce the evils of society and withdraw into our fully equipped Christian Bunker. (Christian music; movies Christian schools; TV stations; Christian video games; Christian Yellow Pages; Christian-retirement homes, etc.). *Imagine the wheat all moving to one small corner of the field and huddling together talking about how mean the weeds are.*

**But Incarnation undercuts isolation.**

We are supposed to be Salt among our friends and neighbors bringing flavor and delight to those who don’t yet call Jesus Lord. We are intended to be “Light” among our friends and neighbors, helping them see life aright, pushing back the dark, revealing hope. **We cannot serve the Kingdom if we isolate ourselves from the world- like salt that refuses to leave the shaker or a lamp under a bowl.**

Neither can we accomplish the Kingdom’s purpose if we try to dominate the world. Too much salt ruins the food- makes it unpalatable. Too much light startles, annoys & blinds. [like a flashlight in the face...to bright for our infirm delight the Truth’s superb surprise...]

When Constantine “converted” to Christianity [ @300ce ] he immediately affixed a symbol of Christ to his soldier’s shields as they went into battle. Very swiftly Christianity went from being a persecuted sect to being a state religion that persecuted others. The temptation **to dominate** the world through Human power structures has dogged The Church through history leaving many suspicious, cynical and angry with Her.

And today, as the modern Church seeks to gather up and deploy political power [human power] to accomplish “Christian” aims- it looks to a lot of students of religious history like another effort to dominate. **This is not how Jesus came to us.** Nor is it how he sent his followers into the world. Lk 10:3 “... behold, **I send you out** as lambs in the midst of wolves.

**The incarnation undercuts domination.**

Imagine the wheat bullying the weeds into pretending to be wheat.

According to the Weeds & Wheat parable, the Kingdom of God grows and flourishes in shared existence with the kingdom of the world- **not isolation or dominance.**

This is why we have services outside the walls of this church: Easter & Summer outdoor service. This is why we share our facility with the Rhody Fest Assn. and open our restrooms for the public. It’s why we join in the Uptown Street Fair or donate space to the Library or the Farmer’s Market.

This is why we were glad that FBC was home for Rhythm Planet for @ 20 years. It's why I keep trying to donate space to the Ladies Chamber Orchestra and Benevolent Society – but they keep giving us money anyway. This is why I continue to look for ways for us to be outside the walls of the church and inside our community.

The isolation of the Children of Israel and the first century Jews is not for us. Neither is the dominion of a Davidic Style king- controlling all aspects of society. For now, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, has declared that God's Kingdom [the wheat] will grow together with the kingdom of the world [the weeds]. And by the power of His Spirit this shared existence will [somehow] at the end of time result in the best possible harvest for the Kingdom of God.

**No isolation, no domination and no compromise.** We are in the world- loving one another, our neighbors and our enemies- but not of the world. The Master has declared: **Let them grow together until the Harvest-** and we trust the Holy Spirit for the rest.

Don't pull up the weeds. Our harvest will be less if you do.  
Let them grow together. Our harvest will be greater if you do.  
We'll separate them at the end and reap the greater harvest.

Letting them grow together for the season is a small thing but it will have a big effect on the size of the harvest.

A mustard seed is a small thing that leads to a big effect.  
A pinch of leaven in the dough is a small thing that leads to big effect.  
Parables are "hidden speech" [a small thing with a great effect???

In letting the wheat and weeds grow together the end of the weeds [roadblocks & lawless people] and the establishment of the wheat in the Kingdom is assured.

Finding the Kingdom is as precious as a secret treasure found  
Finding the Kingdom is as precious as pearl of great price  
Because the destination of the "good fish" is to be gathered and the "bad fish" will be thrown away.