



July 19th, 2020

**The Rev. Michael Burke
St. Mary's Episcopal Church**

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

*Jesus was a Capricorn
He ate organic food
He believed in love and peace
And never wore no shoes
Long hair, beard and sandals
And a funky bunch of friends
Reckon we'd just nail him up
If he came down again*

Chorus:

*'Cause everybody's gotta have somebody to look down on
Who they can feel better than at any time they please
Someone doin' somethin' dirty decent folks can frown on
If you can't find nobody else, then help yourself to me*

*Eggheads cussing rednecks cussing
Hippies for their hair
Others laugh at straights who laugh at
Freaks who laugh at squares
Some folks hate the Whites
Who hate the Blacks who hate the Klan
Most of us hate anything that
We don't understand¹*

Repeat Chorus:

¹ Kris Kristofferson, "Jesus Was A Capricorn" from the album of the same name, Monument Records, 1972.

I remember my tenth birthday, on November 30, 1972. As a present, I received an LP record that had just been released, and was making its way up the charts on the strength of the single, “Why Me, Lord?” In the upper right hand corner, in a thick black font were the words: “Kris Kristofferson,” “Jesus Was a Capricorn”.

And I can still remember taking it out of the cellophane wrapper, using my thumbnail, I would guess, to slit the plastic, and placing it on our old RCA stereo. I dropped the needle, and the room filled with these words of the title track.

(see above)

It was three years later, at the age of thirteen, that I first remember hearing this parable of Jesus’, commonly called the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Although I no longer remember what exactly was said about it from the pulpit in my youth, I do remember distinctly that I understood it as a parable about the unexpected nature of the Kingdom of God, and how we are cautioned by Jesus against assuming that we know who are the “wheat” in this world” and who are the “weeds.”



Darnell (*Lolium temulentum*)

A little background to the story helps: “Tares” refers to a plant common in the Middle East, also called “darnel” (pronounced **dahr**-nl in English, **darnell** in French, if you must know...). It is a particular type of bearded ryegrass that is common in much of the world. It is a great illustration, in that it poses a bit of a dilemma: the roots are so intertwined, as the roots of grasses typically are, that it would be impossible to pull up of the “weed” without pulling up all the wheat.

I am fully appreciating this. I’m remembering a time, as soon as the frost was gone in the Spring, that I did

two things. I reseeded my back yard with grass seed, and I planted several rows of carrots along the edge of my garden. And, either it was windy that day, or, more likely, I was kind of sloppy in my seeding. You can guess the rest. I ended up with grass growing in amidst my carrot patch. Even at an early stage I quickly figured out that I could not pull up the young grass from within the rows of the carrot seedlings without pulling them up as well. But at least carrots look quite different from grass.

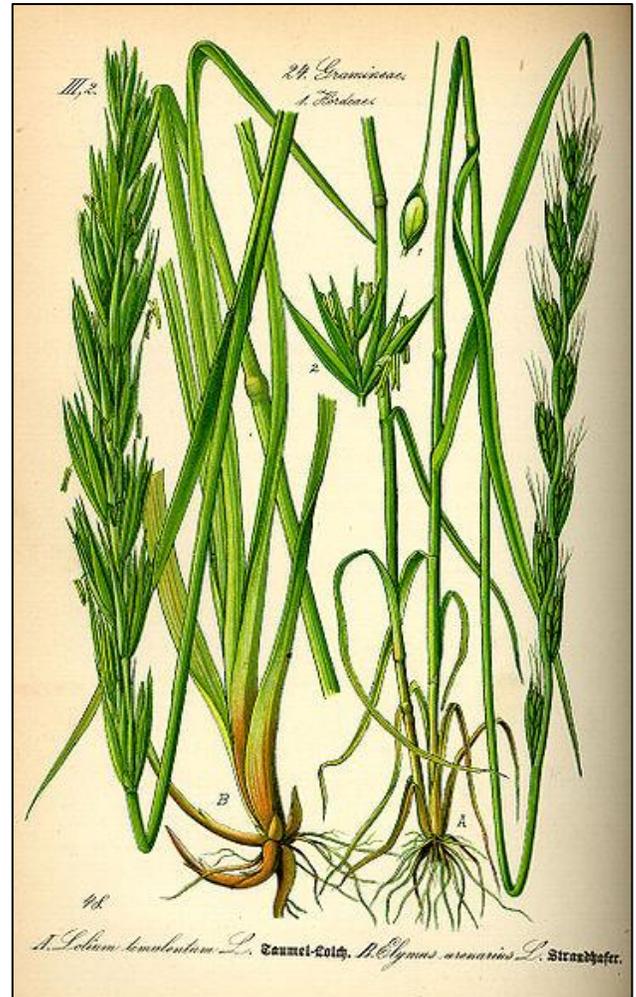
But it gets even better. The thing about darnel is that it is almost indistinguishable from wheat until it matures.² You cannot effectively tell the darnel apart from the wheat, *after* the heads of the grains are formed. That is, not until after the plant “bears fruit” if you will.

It is at this point that the field workers come to the householder and report what has happened. I’ll leave it for you to decide how close they come to either laying blame at the householder or find fault with the seed: “Where did these weeds come from?” they ask?

The householder says, “An enemy has done this.”

And of course the servants *want to pull it all up*.

But the householder tells them, “no,” let them grow together until the harvest time, then the weeds will be collected into bundles and burned, and the wheat gathered into the barn.”



² Darnel usually grows in the same production zones as [wheat](#) and is considered a [weed](#). The similarity between these two plants is so extensive that in some regions cockle is referred to as *false wheat*.^[1] It bears a close resemblance to wheat until the ear appears. The ears on the real wheat are so heavy that it makes the entire plant droop downward, but *L. temulentum*, whose ears are light, stands up straight. The wheat will also appear brown when ripe, whereas the darnel is black.^[2] When the *Lolium* matures, the spikelets turn edge ways to the rachis where the wheat spikelets remain as they grew previously. (Source: Wikipedia, 7-15-2011)

To recap, about the weeds and the wheat:

- 1.) You never know for certain which is which, and
- 2.) The two are intimately intertwined.

God alone is judge.

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And since we are on the subject of judgment, did you notice what in the lectionary appears to be the “end” of the parable, the part where Jesus explains the parable to the disciples in private?

I don’t suppose you missed the part of the “explanation” by Matthew that involved “all causes of sin and all evildoers” being thrown “into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” This particular “ending to Jesus’ parables, as they are explained, is unique to the Gospel according to Matthew, which, incidentally, does not actually name its author, and the title “*The Gospel According to Mathew*” isn’t added to manuscripts until near the end of the second century. Most biblical scholars today believe that it was written down about the year 80-90 B.C.E, (50-60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus) and was based, not on eyewitness testimony by the author, but based on three earlier written accounts including the Gospel of Mark.

An influential view put forth by biblical scholar W. D. Davies within the last couple decades maintains that this Gospel was written to a Jewish community as a direct response to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70.³ According to such a view, the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” that is particular to this Gospel is perhaps understandable to a community which has just seen their culture, relatives, and almost all that is sacred to them destroyed. Perhaps divine retribution at the end of time seems somehow comforting to them in their shock and

³ [Davies, W.D.](#); [Allison, D.C.](#) (1988). [Matthew 1-7](#). T&T Clark; Davies, W.D.; Allison, D.C. (1991). [Matthew 8-18](#). T&T Clark; and Davies, W.D.; Allison, D.C. (1997). [Matthew 19-28](#). T&T Clark.

distress. Matthew's Gospel brings it up on six separate occasions, each times in almost the same words.⁴

In any event, such discussions are best left to adult education, lest we be here for the hour or more that it takes to begin to unpack all this. (Yes, that is a teaser for you to join us in one of the many adult education opportunities at St. Mary's, such as Education For Ministry, Bible Workbench, or one of the Sunday morning adult education groups and classes...)

But even without any of that, it is hard not to get the central thrust of Jesus message in the parable: We live in a world of often frustrating ambiguity, and the human heart is a tilled field with an uncertain crop, already daily approaching harvest.

And judgment of other people, in whatever nature and form, is probably best left to God.

Somewhere inside of me is still a bit of that young boy still thinking about the wheat and the tares. And inside my head, I'm still singing an old, old song:

*'Cause everybody's gotta have somebody to look down on
Who they can feel better than at any time they please
Someone doin' somethin' dirty decent folks can frown on
If you can't find nobody else, then help yourself to me...*

⁴ See: [Matthew 8:12](#)

But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.” (Citations continued at the bottom of the next page)

(citations continued from previous page)

[Matthew 13:42](#)

They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.

[Matthew 13:50](#)

and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.

[Matthew 22:13](#)

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.’

[Matthew 24:51](#)

He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.

[Matthew 25:30](#)

And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.’

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Bearded Darnel Description



The Bearded Darnel, a common grass weed in English cornfields, is easily distinguished by its long glumes or awns and turgid, fruiting pales, containing the large grains, from the common Ray or Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), which is one of the best of the cultivated grasses, peculiarly adapted for both hay and pasture, especially in wet or uncertain climates. Both are often indiscriminately called Darnel or Ray-grass.

Bearded Darnel Details

Botanical: *Lolium temulentum* (LINN.)

—Synonyms—Ray-grass. Drake. Cheat.

(Old English) Cokil; (French) Ivraie; (Arabic) Zirwan.

The seeds or grains of the Bearded Darnel were used medicinally by the ancient Greeks and Romans, but were never official in our Pharmacopoeia.

The admixture of the grain with those of the nutritious cereals amongst which it is often found growing should be guarded against, as its properties are generally regarded as deleterious. Gerard tells us: ‘the new bread wherein Darnel is eaten hot causeth drunkenness.’ When Darnel has been given medicinally in a harmful quantity, it is recorded to have produced all the symptoms of drunkenness: a general trembling, followed by inability to walk, hindered speech and vomiting. For this reason the French call Darnel: ‘Ivraie,’ from Ivre (drunkenness); the word Darnel is itself of French origin and testifies to its intoxicating qualities, being derived from an old French word Darne, signifying stupefied. The ancients supposed it to cause blindness, hence with the Romans, *lolio victitare*, to live on Darnel, was a phrase applied to a dim-sighted person.

The alleged poisonous properties of Darnel are now generally believed to be due to a fungus.

Darnel is in some provincial districts known as Cheat, and there is reason to suspect that the old custom of using Darnel to adulterate malt and distilled liquors has not been entirely abandoned.

Culpepper terms it ‘a pestilent enemy among the corn,’ and in olden days its name was so commonly used as a synonym for a pernicious weed that it has been said that the expression in Matthew xiii. 25, would have been better translated Darnel than tares.

The Arabs still give the name *zirwan* to a noxious grass (which is only too common in the cornfields of Palestine) simulating the wheat when undeveloped, though easily distinguishable at ‘harvest’ time.⁵

⁵ <http://dailypostal.com/2010/05/23/bearded-darnel-description/>; accessed on July 16, 2011.

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Darnel usually grows in the same production zones as wheat and is considered a weed. The similarity between these two plants is so extensive that in some regions cockle is referred to as *false wheat*. It bears a close resemblance to wheat until the ear appears. The ears on the real wheat are so heavy that it makes the entire plant droop downward, but *L. temulentum*, whose ears are light, stands up straight. The wheat will also appear brown when ripe, whereas the darnel is black. When the *Lolium* matures, the spikelets turn edge ways to the rachis where the wheat spikelets remain as they grew previously.

The darnel can be infected by an endophytic fungus of the genus *Neotyphodium*, and the endophyte-produced, insecticidal loline alkaloids were first isolated from this plant.^[3] It parasitizes wheat fields. The French word for darnel is "ivraie" (from Latin *ebriacus*, 'intoxicated'), which expresses that weed's characteristic of making one feel poisoned with drunkenness, and can cause death. This characteristic is also alluded to in the scientific name (Latin *temulentus* = drunk).⁶

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The Gospel

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

⁶ Wikipedia, "Darnel", accessed July 16, 2011. www.wikipedia.com