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Homily

July 19, 2026

Church of the Incarnation

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Isaiah 44:6-8

Psalms 86:11-17

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

## **Wheat and Tares**

I'd like to start with some notes on gardening.

We are now in what many in the South and Mid-West call High Summer. This season brings sweltering heat, the maturation of so much in our gardens and vineyards and fields, long lazy days and warm nights. Corn on the cob, berries of all kinds, bar-b-que and maybe, if we're lucky, lemon meringue pie.

If you are a home gardener, which so many of us are here in Luther Bank Country, you know what this time entails. Waiting for the tomatoes, picking blackberries, putting up jams and tomato sauce

for the winter, planting a second crop of beets, and, ever vigilant weeding.

If you weed in the spring, which most gardeners do, you might think you're done for the season. Well, hardly, observes the seasoned gardener. Weed seeds blow around unimpressed with our cultivated and mulched soil. You know the brilliant yellow heads of the dandelion, beautiful in a field, each one has a gazillion seeds ready to migrate when the puff ball departs the stem. And those puff seeds often can sense the location and availability of your garden and your yard.

So, we go out, hopefully early during the day, and down onto our haunches, and go to work.

Now, Jesus, a carpenter by trade, does not strike me as one who gardened. Yes, he could no doubt build the raised-bed frames, but after that, well, this parable in today's Gospel of Matthew, suggests his proficiencies lie elsewhere.

Or, maybe not. Ancient Palestine, having nothing like an Oliver's, was self-reliant for its own food production. It is name, after all, is the Fertile Crescent. And bread, as it is in every culture, is its staple. You could say the same of wine, as well.

Jesus, as we recall in last Sunday's Gospel, again offers a garden parable, parables being little vignettes, told in such a way as to confound the mind. They still do. Others of faculties must assist.

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses more agricultural imagery to do his ongoing confounding. Last week the parable of the seeds, and, at other times, the mustard seed and the fig tree. In today's Gospel, it's the predicament of an owner of a field cultivated for wheat. The sower, a farm worker, hired hand, or sometimes slave, sews the cleared field with precision. But as the tender shoots emerge, they appear to have amidst them, a second so-called crop, seemingly identical to the shoots of wheat. Commonly known as dandel weeds, or, scripturally, *tares*. They are difficult to weed out, for they look like wheat, and in pulling them, one would disturb the tender wheat shoots. It is not until they both mature that it is evident that this weed is no wheat at all.

The owner of the field tells his workers, counterintuitively, not to weed the tares. He knows that their roots are entangled, and by removing them, the crop will be decimated.

In the ancient Roman Empire, invading another's field and sowing such tares was an act of economic sabotage, and a crime in Roman law.

But Jesus' concern is a bit different.

Jesus explains, at his disciples insistence, that the wheat and the tares are like we humans, and like the human communities we create. Within the community, the city, or the nation, they're people who derive their livelihood, their pleasure, their satisfaction, from doing *evil*—Jesus' word—doing harm to others, causing, but not addressing, human and ecological suffering, by humiliating or shaming others. We may know some such persons, and candidly, we might just be, in some manner, such persons ourselves.

But Jesus does not advocate weaning the evil ones from the community, even as he acknowledges their presence among us, or in us. No, judgment comes at the end, and who knows who will be judged, and for what? What's abundantly clear is that we are not God's chosen instruments to make such judgments.

Jesus knows that we have both a good side, and one that is, at times, haunted by evil. Yes, evil. I am shy to acknowledge this, which I know exists in me, and I daresay, in you too.

This parable acknowledges that no one is pure of heart. No purity project provides cover, only hubris. We cannot dress it up, we cannot fake guilelessness

I'm not talking about Hitlerian levels of evil, nor the evil that psychopaths do. I'm talking about *our* duplicities, our feigning innocence where social evil emerges, our refusal to embrace the grace imparted to us every day, our pitiable self-concerns, our refusal to do the one thing Jesus asks of us, to love one another. Her, yes, but him, *no*.

Jesus looks upon us as our *ever-present* brother. He knows the entanglements of our lives. He knows the binds we find ourselves in, or put ourselves in, the fear that drives our shadow selves. He, too, knows our desire to be more than what on this day we appear to be.

To boot, we live only in community, in communities. Our lives are entangled, we affect each other, we are, in significant ways, in each other. We are saved, this suggests, if you will, not so much saved

individually, but we are saved as one, which is only what we ever truly are.

Grace, if willingly received, brings about a maturing of our true selves, where the good, over time, outweighs the evil, sometimes to the point of its vanishing. Where we can be the wheat, brimming at harvest while negotiating both the evil around us, and, as importantly, as the evil within.

Evil is a strong word, and I am shy to use it. And yet, if I did not know its deceptions in myself, I could not speak with clarity about its presence. But it is not winning the battle for the call you and I have received, to become our true selves, to become true human beings, to become our essential part of the Mystical Body.

On Sunday mornings, I observe there is a bit of a holy quagmire at the tray of votive candles, people in line, kids and adults, families and singletons, people wanting, genuinely, to light a candle, a perfect symbol of our desire to cast out the darkness and be light. The candles really twinkle and glow only after a great many have been lit.

Of course we light only one, but we are immediately joined by one another. Light bearers all. With grace, and each other, and with people of good will from every arc of this planet, we advance toward the light together, individuals, in community, into the sublime Christic Cosmic Whole, the Holy All, and we do so faithfully, with hope, and ultimately, in Love.

