

**SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: 19/7/2026:
SUNDAY BETWEEN 17 AND 23 JULY OS 16a: GEOFF CHADWICK
“COMPASSION FOR THE WEEDS”**

Matthew 13.24-30; 13.36-43

²⁴ He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ 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?” ²⁸ He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” ²⁹ But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ 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.” ’ ³⁶ 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.’ ³⁷ He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

How good are you at identifying weeds? We’ve got plenty of them in Australia. We even have street signs showing photos of noxious weeds that need eradication. After all, a weed is simply a plant that is in the wrong place. Here in Australia, most of our gardens are technically weeds, because we’ve introduced many of the plants from overseas!

When weeding I take heart from Jesus’ parable to leave the plants long enough to be identified. I like to use glyphosate – but not on the lawn, as that would end up badly.

Ah weeds, they have a habit of turning up!

We must remember that when Matthew chose to include this parable in his Gospel, he was writing for the early church of about AD90. By this time the church was established, and new converts were joining it. Nevertheless, there was always the possibility that trouble makers might enter the flock. Existing members, then, were tempted to “weed-out” these troublesome new-comers to keep the church “pure”.

Matthew's retelling of Jesus' parable was a word against this practice. The words of Jesus are clear:

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. (Mtt 13:29-30, NRSV)

Significantly, we are told that it is Jesus who commands the reapers to select out the weeds – at the end of time. Not us! This is a warning against our tendency to do the weeding ourselves. We want to weed people out; and most likely these weeds are the people who are not in our own image. We would gladly pull out the those most unlike us, or most disagreeable to us!

We must remember that Jesus instigates the weeding!

If we are honest, there are people in our churches that we either don't like or cannot agree with. Perhaps they are the ones we avoid at morning tea!

I had an experience once when on holiday when I was shunned by the rector of a parish because, according to him, I had not studied my theology at an acceptable (to him) university! Fortunately, a member of the congregation witnessed what happened and invited me to morning tea! I felt uprooted and replanted at the same time! Would I return to that church- highly unlikely!

Perhaps you've had a similar experience. Where exclusivism barred your sense of belonging. On the other hand you may recall a time when you did the opposite. Where you judged someone too hastily and excluded them too soon. It takes quite a bit of self-awareness and self-honesty to admit this, but it is a reality.

It's part of the human condition where encountering difference demands a certain "sizing-up" on our part.

"Sizing-up" is a "safety mechanism". We must have safe boundaries around our interactions with others. If we have no boundaries, we leave ourselves open to mistreatment and

manipulation. We know only too well the mistakes of the past where the church has not had adequate safeguards to protect the weak and vulnerable.

So in a sense, we do have to be on our guard against “weeds” who would destroy our crop.

These are the people whose conversations are noxious, or drain us dry, or abrade us with their thorns and prickles.

The Diocese has a *Code of Conduct* to manage such inappropriate behaviour. Nevertheless, Jesus’ parable is warning against mis-identification. It’s telling us to delay our judgement just in case we’ve got it wrong. In effect, it’s a warning against *pre-judgement* or *prejudice* as we call it.

One of our problems, I think, is the fast-paced nature of the modern Western World. We’re in such a hurry, that time for proper discernment is limited. We take the prejudice route because it’s more efficient. We make up our minds without any real meeting with the other. We apply the “weed” label to someone before there has been any growth in the relationship. We judge before allowing Jesus to be the judge.

The famous educationalist, Kurt Hahn, who founded, amongst other things, *The Duke of Edenborough Award*, and *Outward Bound* made the following observation in 1941:

There can be no doubt that the young of today have to be protected against certain poisonous effects inherent in present-day civilization.

Five social diseases surround them, even in early childhood.

- *There is the decline in fitness due to modern methods of locomotion;*
- *the decline in initiative due to the widespread disease of spectatoritis;*
- *the decline in care and skill due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship;*
- *the decline in self-discipline due to the ever-present availability of tranquilizers and stimulants,*
- *and the decline in compassion, which William Temple called "spiritual death".*
(<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1111954>)

For Hahn, the most important quality to foster in young people is compassion. He was concerned that young people are too busy to be compassionate.

That was in 1941!

They did not make time to know others, their concerns, their pains, their joys or their longings. Busyness, he said, destroys real connection and real concern.

One wonders if we in our modern world can add a new element to this.

We are too pre-occupied with their digital devices to have compassion!

But before we condemn just young people, is it not the same for all of us?

We are too busy to concern ourselves with the feelings of others. We are too pre-occupied to make room for others. We are quick to judge people as weeds before giving them time to grow and mature. We forget that the final judgement is the Lord's.

So, it's been raining and the weeds are in the garden. I better get out there with the fork and the Glyphosate! Well maybe not just yet-I'll wait to they get a little bigger!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.