

Living by the Spirit

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, July 19, 2026

Hyannis Congregational Church

Genesis 28:10-19, Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24, Romans 8:12-25, & Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

There is something humbling about standing in a field or pasture.

For generations, ranchers and farmers have understood something that the rest of us sometimes forget: growth takes time. A crop cannot be rushed. A seed cannot be planted in the morning and harvested by evening. The farmer can prepare the soil, select the seed, plant carefully, water when needed, fertilize, cultivate, and protect, but ultimately, there is a mystery to growth that belongs to God.

Anyone who has ever walked through a field knows another truth as well: a field is never as simple as it appears from a distance. From the road, a field may look perfectly uniform. The rows appear straight. The plants seem healthy. The green stretches across the horizon like a beautiful blanket. But when you walk among the stalks, when you examine the soil, when you get close enough to see, you discover that the field contains more than just the crop that was planted. There are weeds.

There are plants growing where they were never intended to grow. There are things competing for moisture, sunlight, and nutrients. There are things that threaten the harvest.

Jesus knew this reality when he told the parable of the weeds among the wheat. He used an image familiar to the people gathered around him: a field. A farmer. A harvest. Seeds. Weeds. Patience.

And through this familiar image, Jesus invites us to consider what it means to live in the Spirit.

Because the Christian life is not lived in a perfect field. It is lived in a field where wheat and weeds grow together. It is lived in a world where God's goodness is present, but brokenness remains. It is lived in communities where grace is at work, but sin still competes for space. It is lived in hearts where the Spirit is cultivating holiness, even while old habits and temptations still attempt to take root.

The question for us is not whether there are weeds in the field. The question is: How do we tend the field while trusting the harvest to God?

Our first reading introduces us to Jacob, a man who is not exactly standing in a field of perfection. Jacob is running.

He has deceived his brother Esau. He has manipulated his father Isaac. He has taken what was not his to take. Jacob is carrying guilt, fear, and uncertainty. He is sleeping outside under the open sky with nothing but a stone for a pillow. And there, in that unlikely place, God finds him.

Jacob dreams of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. And God speaks words of promise:

“I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your offspring.”

Notice what God does not say. God does not say, “Jacob, clean yourself up and then I will meet you.” God does not say, “Jacob, fix your mistakes and then I will offer you a promise.” God meets Jacob in the field of his brokenness. God meets him in the wilderness. God meets him before he has earned anything.

This is the beginning of grace.

God’s grace goes before us. Before we ever seek God, God is already seeking us. Before we ever turn toward God, God is already moving toward us. The God who met Jacob in the wilderness is the same God who meets us in the fields of our lives.

The same God who sees our weeds, the places where we struggle, the places where we fall short, the places where sin takes root, is the God who also sees the wheat growing within us. God sees not only what we have been. God sees what we can become. The God Who Knows the Whole Field

Psalm 139 reminds us that we are known completely by God. “Lord, you have searched me and known me.” Before we can live in the Spirit, we must recognize that we live before a God who already knows us.

God knows our strengths and our weaknesses. God knows our victories and our failures. God knows the parts of our lives we proudly display and the parts we try to hide.

The psalmist does not run from this knowledge. Instead, he prays:
“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.”

This is the prayer of someone willing to let God cultivate the soil of their soul.

Every farmer knows that good soil does not happen accidentally. Soil must be tended. It must be examined. It must be worked. The same is true of our spiritual lives.

Living in the Spirit means allowing God to walk through the fields of our hearts and show us what is growing there. Where is the wheat? Where is the fruit of the Spirit? Where is love growing? Where is patience taking root? Where is kindness beginning to bloom?

But also: Where are the weeds? Where has bitterness taken root? Where has pride grown tall? Where has fear choked out faith? Where have we allowed resentment, anger, or selfishness to consume the soil God intended for something beautiful?

The prayer of the psalmist is not a prayer of condemnation. It is a prayer of surrender.

“Search me, O God.”

Because the goal of God’s examination is not destruction. The goal is transformation.

In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that those who belong to Christ are called to live differently.

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

The Spirit does not simply comfort us. The Spirit transforms us.

This is the process of sanctification, the lifelong work of God shaping us into the likeness of Christ.

Salvation is not merely about where we go when we die. Salvation is about who we become while we live. God is growing something in us. God is cultivating holiness. God is producing a harvest.

But anyone who has spent time around agriculture knows that cultivation requires work.

A field left unattended does not become more productive. Weeds do not disappear because we ignore them. A garden does not flourish simply because we hope it will.

The same is true spiritually. The life of faith requires attention. We pray. We worship. We study Scripture. We gather in Christian community. We serve our neighbors. We practice forgiveness. We extend mercy. We share the good news of Jesus Christ.

These are not ways we earn God's love. They are ways we cooperate with God's grace. They are the tools God uses to cultivate the field of our lives. And they are also the tools God uses as we participate in the work of making disciples for the transformation of the world. Because God's field is not just our hearts. God's field is the world.

In Jesus' parable, the servants notice the weeds growing among the wheat and ask the master:

"Do you want us to go and gather them?" But the master says:

"No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them."

This is one of the most challenging teachings of Jesus. The servants want immediate action. They want to separate everything right now. They want a clean field.

But Jesus reminds them that they do not have the wisdom of the harvest. Sometimes, in our desire to remove the weeds, we damage the wheat. Sometimes, in our desire to judge others, we forget that God is still working. Sometimes, in our desire for perfection, we forget that we ourselves are still growing.

The church is not a museum of perfect people. The church is a field where God is growing disciples. We are not called to ignore the weeds. We are called to tend the field faithfully. There is a difference.

Tending means we continue to cultivate. Tending means we teach. Tending means we invite. Tending means we nurture. Tending means we patiently help people grow in Christ.

Our calling is not simply to point out what is wrong with the world. Our calling is to plant seeds of hope. To plant seeds of compassion. To plant seeds of justice. To plant seeds of grace. To plant seeds of the gospel.

Because we never know what God may grow. A conversation at the kitchen table may become a seed of faith. A meal shared with a neighbor may become a seed of belonging. A child taught about Jesus may become a seed of future ministry. A simple act of kindness may become a harvest we never see.

You plant in faith because you trust God with the growth.

Romans tells us that creation itself is waiting for redemption.

“The whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.”

That is the world we inhabit. A world longing for healing. A world longing for peace. A world longing for restoration. And God has entrusted the church with the responsibility of participating in that restoration.

We are not spectators waiting for God to do everything. We are workers in the field. We are called to sow, to cultivate, to nurture, and to live in the Spirit.

The harvest belongs to God. But the work belongs to us.

So today, may we ask ourselves: What kind of seeds are we planting? What kind of field are we cultivating? Are we growing the fruit of the Spirit? Are we helping others discover the love of Christ? Are we tending the grain God has placed in our care?

The beautiful promise of Scripture is that God is not finished with us yet. The field is still growing. The harvest is still coming. And the Spirit of God is still at work. The God who met Jacob under the stars. The God who searched the heart of the psalmist. The God who promises redemption through Christ. The God who plants good seed among us. Is the God who continues to cultivate, restore, and transform.

So let us live in the Spirit. Let us tend the field. Let us sow the seeds of faith. And let us trust that, in God’s perfect time, there will be a harvest beyond anything we can imagine.

Amen.