



## **Jesus' teaching as understood & interpreted from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century rural perspective**

**This represents a series of materials that can be used for devotional studies, discussions, or sermon background. It brings a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective that helps to make relevant Jesus' original parable teaching. It gives an understanding of the rural material from the perspective of the rural people of our time in Australia. There are a lot of spiritual parallels in farming and nature that any rural person would understand see or appreciate.**

**The second in this series is related to Jesus' teaching about cropping and weeds by Ross Neville who has been farming in NSW for 45 years. Ross grew up farming with multiple cultivation practices to eliminate weeds then the use of chemicals and new breeds of wheat revolutionised farm practice. This over the last 20 years has been revolutionised again with minimum tillage improved breeds and companion planting. The machines used have over this period changed significantly in size and technical expertise. Weeds and their control and management are one of the grain farmers biggest costs and problems. Integrated management and living with weeds are some of the latest strategies.**

**Ross sees and believes God still teaches through the normal life situation.**

**There are 5 short story explanations listed below under the heading Weeds and Harvest. You are invited to understand and think through what does this understanding of the biblical passages mean in terms of todays cropping practices and their implication for church and Christian life.**

**The second of this series #WH11-16**

### **'Weeds and Harvest' – Christian competition'**

Foreign bodies in the final product can render the whole load container or even boat load of wheat useless.

Just because some varieties are different doesn't mean they are weed seeds. The UCA is a diverse inclusive church and we have to be careful not to make judgements.

The harvesting winnowing process is a tortuous activity that will severely test and extract all the possible impurities or contaminants in each life each community

**#WH11 'Didn't you sow good seed where did the weeds come from...' Matt 13:27**

Even in the church today people see non Christian activity and attitudes. We should not be surprised at this according to Jesus there will be counterfeit Christians. What do farmers do about weeds today?

**#WH 12 Let them both grow together until the harvest  
Matt:13:30**

Having weeds in a crop is not always disastrous. It can toughen up the wheat, or the church as it tries to eliminate distractions or falsehood.

**WH13 Let both grow together ....I will tell the harvesters....Then gather the seed and bring it to my barn.  
Matt 13:30**

At death and judgement there is a separation and accounting and every farmer knows how critical harvesting is to obtain the purest and best from the life of the seed.

**#WH14 The kingdom is like a mustard seed...that a man plants.... but..... when it grows, outside the garden, it is like a tree Matt13:31-32**

Jesus says the message and the establishment of the kingdom of God may extend beyond what any of us might imagine just like a mustard plant does.

**#WH15-16 Jesus will have a winnowing fork in his hand and he will clear his thrashing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn. Matt 3:11-12 Simon, Simon Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Luke 22:31**

Why would Jesus deal with us the same way as wheat and chaff? Is chaff so terrible?

#WH11

**‘Didn’t you sow good seed where did the weeds come from...’ Matt 13:27**



Even in the church today people see non Christian activity and attitudes. We should not be surprised at this according to Jesus there will be counterfeit Christians. What do farmers do about weeds today? How do they cope? Can we learn from them?

Farming today in Australia we recognise that some seeds lie dormant for long periods of time. (15 -20 years for some of my Bathurst Burrs) Weeds are one of the biggest problem for most grain production. A weed seed can ruin the final product use, and with the extensive practice of crop rotation today, it is becoming an increasingly difficult problem that requires multiple strategies to control. A tiny amount of oilseed or mustard seed in a quantity of wheat can reduce its use from high return milling wheat to low quality stock feed wheat. At delivery points samplers will count the number of foreign seeds in a certain size random sample. At a silo a grain truck can be rejected for receipt and therefore any payment until the matter has been dealt with. A shipload of bulk grain have been rejected from offloading at certain ports in the middle east because of the level of impurities.

Some weeds can be identified as soon as they germinate because the plant looks distinctively different. Other weeds are almost non distinguishable as they grow, some grow a clockwise twist to their leaves, wheat has an anticlockwise and if they are in a row together it is almost impossible to tell apart. The sort of weeds in Jesus’ parable were called tare. They looked like a wheat plants but had distinctive seed that has a terrible flavour, actually it was a slight narcotic, One seed was enough to ruin the end product. In Jesus’ day they had to be handpicked out when all the grain was harvested.. **Jesus is implying some people will look like Christians will grow up in church with other Christians they will convert other people to act like the Christians but it is only when they form disciples or are harvested we discover they are not and that they can ruin a whole church ministry. Gal 4:17,18 Col 2:8 Philippians 1:15-18 2 Thes 2:1-4 3:6-13**

Is this too hard for you to accept? Talk to people who have left the church or have been hurt by the church and you may get another perspective.

## #WH12 Let them both grow together until the harvest Matt:13:30



Having weeds in a crop is not always disastrous. It can toughen up the wheat, or the church as it tries to eliminate distractions or falsehood.

To control most weeds farmers have to use a multiple number of strategies. Crop rotation, cultivation, chipping, spraying to eliminate the viability of the seed production, grazing or mowing weeds before they go to seed the years before, sowing alternative crops that will crowd out or choke weeds to prevent them germinating. The ideal is to eliminate weed seeds before wheat seed is sown. At the time of sowing and immediately afterward it may be necessary to spray the ground to prevent certain specific species being able to grow through the poison or to spray with certain chemicals that will only damage specific species of weed. The deal is to eliminate weeds early in the process. Likewise it is more strategic to eliminate false teaching behaviour exposure for the young Christian. 1 Tim 3:2-11 It is sometimes not economical to spray to eliminate certain weeds because the reduction in yield or the discount will not be enough to cover the cost or damage for weed treatment. 1 Tim 5:1-4 At harvest it may be necessary to bale all the straw or plants and remove from the paddock. Sometimes it is necessary to burn the straw to burn the seeds on the ground so that they won't germinate. All these processes work on the assumption that wheat is best when it has no competition. Recent agricultural practises challenge that assumption and practise. Farmers sow pastures or legumes in with the wheat. They have also discovered companion planting can occur sowing wheat directly into native Australian native grasses. Because some of our native grasses are annual plants they have a different growth cycle and timing to wheat and if the wheat is sown next to the dormant root system the wheat plant roots can follow the annual plant down to greater depth as the moisture is trapped and channelled by the native plants even though it is dormant. The yields may not be as great as a monoculture crop but there are almost no inputs, chemicals and it is sustainable.

Jesus indicated it is worthwhile leaving the weeds in the crop sometimes. 2 Tim 2:20,21 Hebrewes 12:14 The diversity of theological positions and experiences are a sign of different parts of the body. Not everyone is a hand. How can having non Christian friends actually strengthen a persons faith and experience of God?

**#WH13 Let both grow together ....I will tell the harvesters....Then gather the seed and bring it to my barn. Matt 13:30**



At death and judgement there is a separation and accounting and every farmer knows how critical harvesting is to obtain the purest and best from the life of the seed. 1 Cor 5:12

At harvest time the harvesters have to be set to thrash the grain heads at a certain speed and volume to remove the grain from the heads most effectively. This removed grain is then sieved in the machine to separate anything that is different to what is a normal sized grain of wheat. Yet some or sometimes in some crops many impurities cannot be removed completely. There is a warning about just listening and not doing in James 1:22-27 2:14 Jesus said the harvesters will separate the weeds and the by implication the poorer quality wheat. In his day it was done by hand.

At the grain receival delivery point for any grain going to market or to a buyer there is extensive testing to determine the quality of the grain, the protein and the weight, and also the level of impurities (weed seeds) present in the sample. The other impurities that downgrade the quality are improperly formed grains, pinched grains, grain that cracks or breaks during harvest, shot and sprung grains, grains that would not accept the level of threshing to remove the husk that protects them as they grow (white heads) Smut, black spot, colour or diseased grains are identified and assessed.

Do you agree there are different grades of Christians? Hebrews 5:11 -14 Some are tested and go through more rigid testing in their Christian walk than others some crack some are pinched .James 1:2-18 Pinched grain can still be high quality and have all the reproducing qualities of full plump grain. Some christians protect themselves with a shell so much that almost nothing can remove that protective covering and they are not much use in growing disciples.

In some seasons there is little option for a grower but to organise another wheat grader to come and sort out, using different sieve plates, grains that differ too much from the average after harvest. The grain is too valuable and its effectiveness and quality is damaged by the level of grain impurities or malformed grains of wheat.

Jesus indicated it is not up to us to grade or separate people but we are to leave it to those who will do the judgement and harvesting. That is not our task.1 Peter 4:12-19 Jude 17-23

How do we manage living with this mixture of Christian people in our churches?

The Uniting Church believes in 'unity in diversity' and the inclusion of all people as a 'church of reconciliation'. How does this make it hard to stand for, or claim membership of the UCA in your community? What groups in society find these concepts most difficult to understand? Is this a hard thing or should it be something we should rejoice in accept and expect?

**#14WH The kingdom is like a mustard seed...that a man plants.... but..... when it grows, outside the garden, it is like a tree Matt13:31-32 Luke13:18-19 Mark4:30-32**



Jesus says the message and the establishment of the kingdom of God may extend beyond what any of us might imagine just like a mustard plant does.

A farmer in the NW NSW and gradually moving south curses the mustard seed. You can find all types wild mustard. Mustard is part of the Brassica family which in Australia includes, various species of mustard, horlock, wild turnip, rape or canola. Most mustards are under One metre tall. It is a tremendously invasive weed that suits many soil types and likes winter and spring rains. It spreads along the road by being blown because it is such a small light seed: It comes from lorry's of grain, from out of paddocks in the wind, or it is crevices in harvest machinery as the machinery moves from area to area. 1 John 4:-6 2 John 7-11

It looks pretty when in flower, but it does stink, especially at flowering time, it is invasive, hard to control in crops and will restrict cropping options unless it is controlled. Because the seed is so small it passes through most harvest machines and can contaminate loads of wheat and render them useless for bread flour.

The seed germinates as a broad leaf plant that spreads, covering the soil and crowding out other plants. Each mustard plant can produce up to 10,000 seeds. Species of mustard are sown as a commercial crop and it is sown in some vegetable and herb gardens for domestic use. Some mutations and some species grow wild and grow into larger plants up to 3 or 4 metres tall as happens in Israel, South America, India and China.

These alternate species are most likely the mustard Jesus was alluding to in this parable of the kingdom. A common commercial seed sown in the garden that produces a small plant 1 metre high can not by itself regenerate into another form as a tree 3 -4 m high. Jesus obviously wasn't using this parable to illustrate how something small becomes big because as a carpenter he would have known and used any number of commercial tree examples.

The Christian message and experience can begin with a small humble common action word or deed that can grow unexplainably and often unknown to the original sower into something much bigger and multifunctional than the original intent. Anyone who has taught Sunday school or helped with youth groups are always amazed at where the seeds of faith sown grow and what they grow into. Share some Christian life experience where something grew away from your original understanding and purpose.

How do you see the Christian gospel spreading like Brassica plants around the world?

**#WH15 Jesus will have a winnowing fork in his hand and he will clear his thrashing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn. Matt 3:11-12 Simon, Simon Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Luke 22:31**



In today's farming language John would say. Jesus will harvest the crop of souls with his harvester. This machine will thresh out the grain from the chaff and other impurities. The pure grain will be taken to the silos and the chaff and weed seeds will be destroyed. This sounds as if it will be painful and it is for all parties including the seed of wheat.

What actually does a harvester do to separate the grain and what does this parable imply about the separation of Jesus' followers from the rest of humanity. The harvester today combines many operations into one machine. The straw is cut and funnelled into spinning drum or alternatively an axial flow drum that has a controlled speed. The straw and heads of wheat are compressed into a closely confined space between steel bars and the spinning drum. The heads of wheat have the grain separated from the husks and straw by physical force. Older style harvesters after this thrashing then moved the grain upwards through grates and sieves that shake and further separate the grain from the chaff. A uniform size and shaped grain is collected and the straw and chaff are pushed out the back of the machine in windrows. Axial flow headers centrifuge the grain through sieves and send a more pulverised straw and chaff out the back to be spread across the ground or it is sometimes immediately made into hay bales. Very small grains, foreign seed shapes are separated and disposed of independently to the whole grain and chaff or thrown out with the chaff. The almost pure grain is stored in a bin on the harvester until it is full it is then augured into a trailer or a following truck which takes the grain into bigger forms of silo storage.

What is the nature of the winnowing Jesus will be doing to humankind? Hebrews 12:1-12 James 5:7-12 1 Peter 4:12-19

It is sometimes forgotten that it is the wheat seed which goes through a rough time.

There will be a cutting, shaking and threshing that everyone will go through. This will be a shock to the system. The head, family or church we belonged to will be removed from us. The separation will remove our shell, husk or human body and expose the pure seed that is our soul and this is what Jesus wants to see and save.

## #WH16

Jesus will have a winnowing fork in his hand ..... gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Psalm 1:4 identifies who/what the chaff is... The ungodly...are like the chaff Isaiah 5:24



Why would Jesus deal with us the same way as wheat and chaff? Is chaff so terrible?

In the early mechanical harvesting days the chaff coming out the back of the harvester was often burned to eliminate foreign seeds, dry vegetable matter and weeds.

Burning was also once understood to be helpful building up the carbon ash that was then incorporated into the soil soon after burning to build the soil up for next year.

The burning of the residue from the crop has been a practice for centuries. It has only recently been understood that the burning actually can do more damage to the soil in the climate we have in Australia and is actually destroying what could be a useful by-product for next year crop. Burning stubble and chaff exposes the soil and makes it vulnerable to wind and water erosion. It also reduces the water penetration potential of rain into the soil profile by baking the soil if the fire is too hot and slow. Using the straw and chaff as a mulch actually absorbs water and protects the soil from drying or eroding. New machinery and chemicals allow the seeding of wheat into significant quantities of straw mulch. Chemicals are also now used to control foreign plants that may be carried over in the chaff or are in the soil to interfere with next year's crop.

We can also use chaff or straw today to provide mulch for mushrooms or emergency roughage for livestock. Titus 2:1-15

Fire has been an instrument for cleansing of the soil from one year's crop to the next.

What is the implication for passing the gospel on from one generation to the next with this parable. What are some of the chaff, weeds or straw we build up in our lives for our generation that help us sow and harvest the gospel. Do we recognise that much of this that may actually interfere with the next generation's task of sowing the gospel.

Are some of our inflexible buildings, music and structures sometimes chaff that should be removed and destroyed from one generation to the next?

We know from grain silo explosions and the fires that sometimes occur in silos that wheat dust and chaff are a highly volatile and explosive mix that is extraordinarily difficult to extinguish. Even today it is almost an inextinguishable fire that can only be quenched by the elimination of oxygen.

The winnowing process has to completely remove all impurities of dust and residual chaff or else the whole wheat grain stockpile is vulnerable to internal combustion or explosion. The flour produced by the grain will be compromised. Jesus is implying

We have to purify ourselves by obeying the truth 1 Peter 1:22 James 4 :8 Psalm 51; 10-17 Purify our hearts. Our faith and our lives have to be pure.

If any impurities remain it can have devastating longer term consequences on the survival of our souls. Are there impurities in your life still?