

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 7A
July 19, 2020
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Planted in God's Garden

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. (Matthew 13:24-25 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Anyone who's ever tried to grow a garden can relate somewhat to our text. Among the good plants, be they vegetables, flowers, herbs, or something else, is the perennial problem of weeds. What to do? Many people will diligently pull them out as soon as they appear so as to nurture the growth of the good plants. Some, though, will just let them grow and hope they don't totally kill the good plants or keep them from growing and producing good fruit. In any case, at the end of the day, or season, the only thing to be done with the weeds is to destroy them. They are good for nothing.

With that in mind, we hear our Lord's parable of the weeds, or tares. And as we listen, we once again let our Lord Himself explain the parable to us. For as simple as this parable sounds, it has much to say to us.

First of all, Jesus tells us that the Sower is the Son of Man, that is, Jesus Himself. Last week, we heard a parable in which the seed that was sown was the Word of God. Today, the seed is those in whom the Word of God was heard, taken to heart, producing fruit. Jesus plants His good seed, His children, in the world so they may grow and bring forth a harvest of faith which produces good fruits. Praise God that you are that seed!

But all is not well, for into that same field, Satan, Jesus' enemy and yours, comes and sows his seeds of tares, or weeds. Now these are seeds of no ordinary weeds, because as they sprout and grow they are indistinguishable from the wheat. You can't tell them apart until they start to produce fruit, and that fruit is toxic and poisonous. This is the way Satan operates. He seldom utilizes a full frontal assault. Rather he works in secret under the cover of darkness. The evil seed he sows takes root without being detected. In the world, he sows as much evil as he can. He intermingles his sons, unbelievers, with Christ's believers, his false church with Christ's true Church. These unbelieving tares may appear to be Christian, at first, but have no regard for the Lord and His Word. These tares may believe and teach that Christianity should, indeed must, capitulate to the society around it. This leads to all kinds of abominable teachings and practices. Indeed, Satan even infiltrates the Church with the ways and thoughts of the world, and he does it in such a way that those who oppose such things are seen as the evil ones.

So what should be done with the tares once they're discovered? Should they immediately be torn out and destroyed? That's what we would do, isn't it? Certainly that's what the servants in the parable thought should be done. It reminds us of a certain occasion when Jesus sent some messengers into a Samaritan town. When Jesus was not received, James and John said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54). Yes, if it were up to us, we would probably pull up the tares and destroy them without hesitation.

But when the Sower answers, He explains a different way. Indeed, He sounds much like Jesus' answer to James and John, "But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.'" (Luke 9:55-56). Indeed, through the prophet Isaiah God says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:8-9). Yes, my dear friends, the Lord's way is a Gospel way. Jesus' way is a saving way.

That's why Jesus tells us, "Let both grow together until the harvest." That certainly sounds strange, doesn't it? Let the tares grow with the wheat? Won't those tares strangle the wheat, as we heard last week? Yet, that's what Jesus says. Unbelievers and evil surround us in the world. False believers, claiming the name and blessing of Jesus, are going to be around until the Last Day. To the eyes of many, they will look like a good, helpful, productive crop, yet their fruit is deadly. But on the Last Day, when our Lord Jesus returns in judgment, the separation will take place and it will be final. And that's really the point of the parable.

"So where is the Gospel in this?" you may ask. Well, here it is - Christ allows the tares to grow until the harvest because to pull up the tares would also cause the wheat to be pulled up. To destroy the tares before the harvest would destroy the wheat too, and Christ doesn't want that to happen.

You see, Christ has planted His seed in you and has planted you in His Church and in the world. And though Satan attacks with all his wiles, he cannot and will not prevail. When the Lord of the harvest sends His angels, He will gather His wheat into His barns; He will deliver His people into the safety and glory of heaven. You, my friends, are being kept for the great harvest on the final Day of Resurrection. You who were made righteous through Jesus' blood, will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father.

Until then, you are the Lord's, and He will preserve you. He so carefully and painstakingly cares for you that He will not allow any of those secretive "hypocrites or evil people" to be uprooted from your midst, lest you also be uprooted with them. For we do not know who are wheat and who are tares. We cannot see what's in another person's heart, just as they can't see what's in yours. And it's not our job to do the separating anyway.

So the tares live among the wheat until the harvest. Why? Because Jesus is concerned for the wheat, His people. He could bring His awesome judgment to bear anytime He pleases, but He doesn't. He wants your salvation to remain intact. The Lord Jesus who paid for your forgiveness - indeed who set the whole world free from sin by His suffering, the shedding of His Blood, and His death on the cross - He knows that you are weak. He is fully aware that, although you are His precious wheat, you still do many weed-like deeds. He wants to spare you from being uprooted when the terror of judgment is unleashed. The darnel weeds have an unfair advantage. Their roots are stronger and they're more spread-out. If you pull them up, those roots will latch on to the wheat and rip it out too. Your heavenly Father does not want that to happen even to one wheat plant - even one true Christian scooped away as collateral damage is too much. So weeds and wheat wait together until the harvest, and then they are separated.

We've been taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come." As we do, we express our heart-felt desire for God's kingdom to come among us. And so it does, even without our prayer. So it's not our business to identify and pull up the tares among us in the world. That remains for the angels of the harvest because the field and the harvest are the Lord's. Until then we wait. Until then we grow, being nurtured by the Word of God and Christ's Body and Blood. Until then we struggle against the devil and his tares in this world with the absolute certainty that on that Day of harvest we will be gathered into the Lord's barn. That's Jesus' promise and that is our hope and confidence.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener