

King of Glory Lutheran Church – July 22-23, 2017

Year A: Pentecost 7 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, do your part, live according to the Spirit.*

*We all jump to judgment – it is in our nature to do so – strive to live peaceably, strive for the kingdom,*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The label on the weed killer was clear. This would only kill the dandelions and crabweed and other pesky green things. It wouldn't kill the grass. Great! Good to go. Matthew would have liked this product. Because in Matthew's Gospel there is little wiggle room. It is sheep or goats. Good or evil. The furnace of fire or the kingdom of the Father. Wheat or weeds.

We can relate to this binary kind of frame of mind, can't we? On or off. Up or down. Left or right. Light or dark. Hot or cold. 1 or 2.

Matthew's community is undergoing persecution from the Roman government. There are clearly good guys and bad ones. He's writing to a community who were likely former members of a synagogue. In addition, there may be some strife and conflict within the Jewish community. Therefore people are concerned about who is in and who is out. Matthew feels the world is fragile, but urges a patience for God's judgment to prevail.

And if you want to understand Matthew's Gospel, actually this isn't a bad place in the text to stop, pause and listen. What do we hear? There is judgment for certain; especially for the outsiders. We also hear about Kingdom of God. Remember back in Matthew 5, where Jesus draws out the vision for the Kingdom in the Beatitudes? It's the poor who are blessed. Blessed are those who mourn and are persecuted for His sake. Hmm. Keep

that in mind because Matthew has a fondness for those of little faith and authentic faith.

So what is this parable all about then, anyway? There are good wheat seeds sown. Then an evil one comes to toss in some bad seed; weeds actually! The honest slaves see them coming up and want to correct the situation right away, but the Master doesn't let them. For if the unwanted weeds get pulled out, that will damage the root system of the good wheat and the whole field will be ruined. No. Jesus and God will take care of it all come judgment. Weeds will be burned up in the fire and the wheat will be harvested.

Weeds and wheat. Good and bad. Those who have power and those who do not. Those who are persecuted and those who persecute. The one bad apple that spoils the whole bunch. They are out there, aren't they! Yes! We all know that.

We can certainly relate to this kind of thinking. Today there is all sorts of rhetoric about who is in and who is out, who are the good guys and who are the bad. It doesn't matter your political leaning, your vocation, your religion, there is plenty of blame to go around. People are marked for good or ill.

If Jews in Matthew's time were being persecuted, this parable could be good news for them. Their oppressors would get their due at some point. Jesus says to them, "Hang in there. You can survive, because one day, God will judge."

What about the country of Venezuela? There are citizens of that country who feel their rights are being violated. There are strikes, deaths and people filling the streets. Who is wheat and who is weed. This parable might speak to their situation.

Here's something curious. What Matthew most likely refers to, when speaking of the weed "is darnel or cockle, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and real wheat is evident only when

the plants mature and the ears appear. The ears of the real wheat are heavy and will droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight.”

([https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=979](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=979))

So all the wheat and the weeds look the same. It isn't evident until the plants come into maturity – until the point where the plant does something to reveal it is different from the others.

What about racial profiling? We are coming up on the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. We know that racial profiling exists. We want our government to keep our nation safe. But the practices by which they do that are varied. Even amongst us, we might agree with those practices and we might not. Some people are looked at with suspicion while others are not. “Who are the weeds? Who is the wheat?”

*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*

So here's the good news and the bad news. Every institution, every community has the capacity to commit sin (do evil) and to work for good.

Even the Church is not exempt! Throughout time there has been a history of trying to root out those with wrong interpretations of scripture or improper liturgical practices or those with a particular stance on an issue that one side deems 'not right'. Look at Martin Luther! The Catholic church thought he was a weed! Kicked him out and hunted him down! He had to run for his life and hide in Wartburg Castle. For we who think we are so loving and kind, we too have capacity to hurt others in our 'righteousness.'

The evil that we deplore goes beyond just institutions and communities. What about our own households and we as individuals. I think about families where abuse takes place. It's

covered up and hidden out in public, but behind closed doors, there is a very different story of pain.

Paul – even Paul in the Bible says, I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I do not want. Our inner nature, we are both wheat and weed. Want to do a quick self check? Run through the 10 Commandments. Thou shalt not lie, steal, think ill of our neighbor, want things that are not ours.

Remember our Lutheran theology that says we are both saint and sinner? Because of Jesus' cross, we are saints; made right with God. Yet at the very same time, we inhabit this earthly flesh and are sinful people. We, too, are wheat and weed for life.

Let's go back to the parable. The master tells the slaves not to pull out the weeds. It's the angels job. It's God's job. The judgment that is to come will be up to God. God will have the last word. I find that comforting because we, even on our best days, can really know what motivates a person to speak or act like they do. We might not like it, but they rest secure in God's redemptive power and God's judgment, just like all of us.

Therefore, if we trust that God will judge, we are free to continue deploring the evil around us while working for good. We can love our neighbor, stand up against injustice, support those we love and those whom we struggle to love.

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...

Did you hear the words of the Romans text this morning? We are to live by God's spirit and not our flesh. We are to yearn for all that God yearns for and hope in those things. 'Hope that is seen isn't hope. We hope for what we don't see.' We wait for it with patience.

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. The hymn of the day also says: we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The beauty of a parable is that we don't have to understand it fully. We can hear it, allow it to break open some new part of our spirit and thoughts. God's Word is our feast.

In just a moment we'll get to come to the table. And God's Word is met here with earthly elements. What's on this table? Wheat. Wheat that might have been grown in a field where there were weeds. But this is our bread. Jesus' bread of life in fact.

And who stands around this table? Wheat and weeds. Sinners who are saints. People of faith and hope that God will come to judge us and judge the world with righteousness.

Because the parable says, the angels will come and root out all kinds of evil. For St Matthew, it's not so much about finding the bad guys and getting them out of the way for the rest of us. No, it's more cosmic than that. The systemic sin that holds us captive, God promises to eradicate. Greed. Pride. Lust. Brokenness.

Thus we come to feast, not only on the sure and certain hope that we are found forgiven, but praying that one day in God's timing, the whole earth will be able to stop groaning under the burden of evil and sin.

Jesus' death was not for naught. It was for us and all of creation. The weeds and the wheat. The sheep and the goats. All humanity in need of God's redemptive love and care.

Seek ye first the Kingdom. Then your energy will be spent in positive thoughts towards God rather than destructive thoughts about your neighbor. God will take care of the rest. Now...the wheat bread awaits. Amen!

