

July 23, 2023
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 (Romans 8:18–27)

AWAITING GOD’S HARVEST.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Earlier this week I had an appointment with a doctor who was born and raised in a Christian home in Nigeria. He was lamenting how today in the United States, in the land of plenty and of the free, it seems that many people are falling away from faith, rejecting the One true God and embracing the very evil that God condemns. It is true. Surveys show that the percentage of American adults who identify as Christian have been declining year after year, while the number who do not identify with any religion has been rapidly rising.

[\(https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/12/21/key-findings-from-the-global-religious-futures-project/\)](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/12/21/key-findings-from-the-global-religious-futures-project/)

The authority of Holy Scripture has always been rejected by unbelievers, but attacks on Christian faith and doctrine used to be veiled and indirect. That no longer seems to be the case. There are people of prominence and in positions of authority who openly reject God Word as evil and claim it is damaging to society. Surprisingly, even within the Christian Church there are many who prioritize human wisdom and reason as having authority over God’s Word. There are politicians who publicly claim to be Christian but support legislation that is an abomination to God. And while this can be cause for concern and distress, it should not come as a surprise. St Paul says that:

“... we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

As fierce as the battle may appear to be in our world today, you have our Lord’s promise that the gates of hell will not prevail. (cf: Matthew 16:18) Christ Jesus will not allow the devil with all his works and all his ways to have the upper hand. Now, of course God never promises that any particular Christian congregation or denomination will never pass away. But the one true Church, the body of Christ in the one holy Christian and Apostolic Church will endure forever.

As the old hymn proclaims:

***Built on the Rock the Church shall stand
Even when steeples are falling.*** (Lutheran Service Book #645)

In our Gospel parable today, we are reminded that Christ Jesus our Lord who dwelt among His people and was at work 2,000 years ago, continues to dwell and work on earth today – and will continue doing so until He returns in glory on the Last Day. In today’s ***Parable of the Weeds***, there are ***two sowers*** and there are ***two types of seed***. Both seeds are sown into one field, which

represents the world. (cf: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43) Our Lord Jesus is the sower of *good seed* and the *good seed* are the *children of the kingdom*, meaning all who believe in Christ around the world. (cf: Matthew 13:38) In contrast, the other sower is the devil. He is the enemy and the *sower of weeds*. The *weeds* are the *sons of the devil*, the sinners, the hypocrites, and the unbelievers of the world.

Martin Luther once said:

“...where God builds a church, the devil places a chapel next door.” (LW 23, 285)

The parable teaches us how the kingdom of God and Christianity fares in this broken and sinful world. We often refer to the *invisible* Christian Church as all the true believers in the world. But in another sense, the Church in this world is *visible* with flesh and blood. While God works through His Word and Sacraments to plant *good wheat* into the kingdom of His Church, the devil is actively hard at work planting *weeds*, sowing the seed of division and unbelief among those who are Christian.

The weed that Jesus refers to in the Parable is most likely called *darnel*. (cf: Lutheran Study Bible, 1608) Darnel grows with deep strong roots and looks so much like wheat that in some places it is called *false wheat*. It is only after the head of grain comes on the stalk that the weeds are recognized for what they truly are. These weeds and false wheat are a picture of the false believers in the world and those who have fallen from faith. You know exactly what this is like.

We would like to think that all people who go by the name Christian were indeed true believers. But the fact is, Scripture teaches that there are unrepentant false believers within the visible congregation. They sing and pray with the true believers while at the same time, they keep their love of wealth and possessions, sexual proclivities, and other sinful baggage locked up out of sight.

In the visible Church, you and I cannot determine who belongs to the true Church. God alone can see into the hearts of men. Judas Iscariot is an example of this. He lived, and walked, and reclined at the table with Jesus for 3 years – but betrayed Him with a kiss for 30 pieces of silver. (cf: Matthew 26:15, 49) Judas is an example of the devil sneaking in and planting his unbelieving weeds so close to the good seed that the roots become intertwined.

The devil has been a liar and murderer since the beginning. The devil cannot create. He only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. (cf: John 10:10) He sows the weed seed of evil ideologies and false beliefs that openly mock God’s created order for sexuality, the family, and marriage, which are the very fabric of society through which God continues to provide and sustain the world. And what is even more concerning is – it is exactly what the parable illustrates.

The devil plants these ideologies and false beliefs within the Christian church and they are sometimes believed and embraced by brothers and sisters in the pews and even within entire denominations. False believers put on a false appearance of virtue while truly living a life in unbelief. And unfortunately because you and I are simultaneously saint and sinner, sometimes we do weedlike things due to our sinful human weakness.

The devil desires that you believe the church is co-mingling politics and religion when speaking about questions of life, sex and gender. The devil has seduced the world and your sinful flesh into believing that *“it’s your body so it’s your choice”* to do whatever you wish with your body: identify as a different sex, destroy your God given sex, take your own life, take the life of a little one growing in the womb. The devil desires that you fear, love, and trust in yourself and the government’s apostate laws above all things. He tempts you to put your faith and trust in men rather than in God and His Word.

Nothing in this world happens outside the purview of our omniscient God. So it might seem puzzling why God allows us to languish in the sufferings of this sinful world, just as the Master in the parable instructs His servants not to pull out the weeds, but to let them grow with the wheat until harvest. But that is the way it is living in the world today in Christ’s kingdom of grace. Just as the wheat and the weeds are intertwined in the parable, jealousy, fits of anger, dissensions and divisions exist within the Christian Church. (cf: 1 Corinthians 11:18–19) But the Master warns to pull one out by the root might uproot the other.

Now, that does not mean that the local church is not to practice church discipline. The local church must not aid and abet or passively accept the evils we see in our society and among visible churches. We are called to speak the truth in love, (cf: Ephesians 4:15) calling all openly unrepentant sinners to repentance and to live as a baptized believers in Christ. The pastor is charged with calling secret unrepentant sinners and all who are simultaneously saint and sinner due to our sinful human weakness, including you and me, to repent. Repent of fearing, loving, and trusting in yourself and the wisdom of man above God and His Word. Repent of believing that *“it’s your body so it’s your choice”* to do whatever you wish with your body. It is not your body. St Paul tells us that:

“... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

Jesus says:

“... repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, repent and receive the Absolution, believing as if Christ were dealing with you Himself.

I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the parable, the Master tells his servants to leave the weeds and the wheat to grow together until the harvest. This is comfort to all who are wheat, all who are children of the kingdom of God. Even while you struggle and suffer under the weight of the weeds of the world and the uncertainty, Scripture teaches that:

“... the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed...” (Romans 8:18)

Christian hope is not hope in the things of this world and the things that you see. Your hope is in what is unseen and yet to come – the promises of your Savior that are still to be fulfilled. And in that hope, you wait with patience. (cf: Romans 8:25) The day is coming when our Lord Jesus

will return in glory and His angels will do the sorting. All who have not trusted and believed in Christ Jesus, those who have really been sons of the devil, they will face the eternal torments of hell. However, all the children of the kingdom which are those who trust and believe that they have been declared righteous by precious shed blood of Christ will be gathered into the barn of our Lord's eternal kingdom in heaven. Jesus says:

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matthew 13:43)

He who has ears, let him hear. Listen up! Our loving Savior does not want this parable to go in one ear and out the other. So we pray that our Lord grant us ears to hear with faith, that being mindful of His final judgment, we be stirred up to holiness of living here on earth and dwell with Him in perfect joy in the hereafter.

God may seem slow to return, but His timing is always perfect. The Parable of the Weeds encourages you to stand firm in the sufferings of this present time, trusting that our Lord Jesus is coming in glory to reap the harvest, when He will justly and truly judge the living and the dead. He has suffered God's entire wrath against your sin on Calvary's cross. After three days of being dead and buried, God raised Him so that you might be declared righteous before God, just as it you had never sinned.

Christ Jesus has defeated the sower of the weeds, the devil. He sees all, knows all, and will bring all into the light. He calls all who believe to trust and be faithful in lives of daily repentance and faith being sustained by the hope of what you cannot yet see. You know that the glory which will finally be revealed by God's victory in Christ will outshine all you now have. It is not of your own doing but by the work and grace of our Triune God. To Him alone be the glory.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.