

## “THE GOOD FARMER”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

July 23, 2017

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 13, verses 24 through 30, and then skipping down to verses 36-43. This is on page 691 of the pew Bible. In this parable, Jesus explains why the Kingdom of God on earth doesn't look more powerful or pure. Please stand as you are able for the gospel. From Matthew 13, we begin reading at verse 24.

<sup>24</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. <sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ <sup>28</sup> He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ’ ”

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<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*  
You may be seated.

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What's the point of being a Christian? Sometimes it seems like it would just be easier to be a heathen. We look at our lives, and they might seem be pretty mediocre, while others who are just living for themselves seem to be having so much more fun. It may even be that we find our lives to be quite difficult. It just seems wrong when we see the wicked flourishing.

It's kind of like when a kid gets upset and says to his or her parents, “I wish you weren't my parents.” And it's not just when the kid doesn't like the rules of the house. Sometimes it's that,

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but other times it’s simply because the child doesn’t get his or her way. Your friend Billy gets a new PlayStation 7—or whatever they’re up to now—and all you have is an old Atari your mom found at a garage sale. For a moment, you feel like life would be so much more fun with someone else’s parents.

Sometimes we can feel the same way as Christians. When we are oppressed by the devil, the world, and, especially, our own sinful flesh, we are tempted to think life would be so much easier if we weren’t Christians. And that might even be true. I don’t recommend trying this experiment, but our lives might actually be easier if we just gave our Bibles to a thrift store, withdrew our church membership, quit praying, and told God to take a hike. Life as a heathen might actually be easier than life as a child of God. So why don’t we try it? Well, because our hope as Christians is not in this life. In our epistle lesson, Saint Paul takes the long view: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

And Jesus teaches the same thing. In this parable he teaches us to look toward the future. When we look around and see wickedness flourishing, Jesus reminds us to take the long view.

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The parable comes to us in two parts: first, the parable itself, which Jesus sets before the crowds, and then, after two other parables in the middle, the explanation, which he gives privately to his disciples.

The parable isn’t hard to interpret, especially since Jesus tells us what everything in the parable represents. The crowds, however, did not have that luxury. They would have been able to figure out at least some of it. Since the opening line is, “**The kingdom of God may be compared to ...**” (13:24), it is obvious enough that the man who plants the seed represents God. And they probably understood that the wheat represents the righteous children of God, while the weeds represent the children of the evil one. They also might have understood the enemy as the devil, and the harvest as the end of the age.

Understanding these elements, the crowds should have been able to get the general point that God’s judgment of the wicked will be delayed until the end of the age. And until that time, the Kingdom of God—at least in its earthly form—is going to be a mixed bag. Or, to put in agricultural terms as Jesus does, it is going to look like a weedy field where the wheat struggles to grow because of the surrounding weeds.

Jesus also identifies a few other elements of the parable privately for his disciples. The sower is not merely God in general as a transcendent being. But Jesus identifies the sower as “**the Son of Man**” (13:37). This is a title Jesus often uses to refer to himself. Jesus is the sower in the parable.

And since this parable of the weeds immediately follows the parable of the sower, where the seed is identified as the Word of God (13:19), we should naturally understand the seed to have the same meaning in this parable. The seed is the Word of God, which, when it is sown, sprouts into “**the sons of the kingdom**” (13:38).

In addition, “**The field is the world .... The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.**” (13:38-39)

The things and events of the parable correspond to reality. So, yes, we learn from Jesus that there really is a devil (13:39), there really is a hell, which is referred to here as “**the fiery**

furnace” (13:42), and there really are people who will go there (13:41-42). This, of course, is not a popular teaching, and it does not earn the Church any “street cred” with the world.

So it can be difficult to hold onto this unpopular teaching. In a world where people tend to believe whatever they want, Christians are seen as just plain mean for believing there is a hell, as if we actually want people to go there. But I hope I can speak for all of us when I say, *We don't*. Our belief in the existence of hell is based, not on wishful thinking, but on the testimony of Scripture, especially the numerous references Jesus makes to it.

We should also note that while there is a hell, and people really do go there, we do not get to make the determination of who. The angels separate the evil from the righteous, and Jesus is always the judge.

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So those are the elements of the parable. And in order to best understand this parable, it will be most helpful to consider the first century historical context in Israel.

The general expectation the Jews had for the Messiah was that he would deliver Israel from political oppression. Israel was under the control of the Roman Empire. And while Rome was not as cruel as some of Israel's previous occupiers, they were not exactly appreciated. In addition to this, much of Israel's religious hope was tied up in their national identity. As God's chosen people, they naturally assumed they should at least be a free nation, if not the most powerful of them all.

So they commonly expected that when God sent his promised Messiah, this Messiah would bring them political and economic prosperity. This, really, is what every nation wants from its leaders.

So here comes Jesus on the scene. And he does some remarkable things. “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (11:5). So the people start to wonder if Jesus might be this Messiah they have been waiting for. The miraculous signs and wonders are all there, but there aren't really any large scale changes in the political or economic fabric of Israel. There are a few free meals, some interesting sermons, and some sick people get better. As remarkable as this is, though, it's only helping a few people, not the whole nation. The ministry of Jesus ultimately leaves the crowds unsatisfied. So the people are really starting to wonder if Jesus is actually going to make Israel great again. And the answer Jesus gives through this parable is, *No, at least not when you want, or in the way you expect.*

The Kingdom of God on earth is like a weedy field. There are the sons of the kingdom, and there are the sons of the evil one—the devil. And if the weeds are going to be destroyed in the end anyways, we might wonder, *Why doesn't God just get rid of them now?* I mean, they're not making life any easier. For the first century Jews in Israel, they couldn't help but wonder why God allowed the heathen Romans to occupy their land. And when we look around the world, seeing terrorism and murders and riots and all sorts of wicked atrocities, we wonder the same thing: *Why doesn't God just get rid of the wicked already?* If they're going to burn in the end anyways, let's just get it over with so we can have some peace.

So in the parable the farmer's servants ask him if they should go pull up the weeds. This apparently made sense to the servants. The wheat will grow a lot better without the weeds choking them and competing for water and nutrients. But the farmer is smarter than that. Pulling up the weeds would also uproot the wheat. Apparently their roots had become

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intertwined because the weeds were sown right on top of the wheat. There was no way to separate the weeds and the wheat until the harvest. And we learn from this that there is also no way to separate the wicked from the righteous until the judgment at end of the age.

When we wish that God would just remove all the wicked people from the world, we make one critical error. We assume that we ourselves are not among the wicked. If God were to simply remove all wickedness from the world, you know who would get destroyed? You and me. God allows wickedness to remain in the world because he is merciful and patient, both with ourselves, and with the people we think are more wicked than us. The evil in the world is not only around us; it is also within us, and that is the bigger problem.

Dear Christians, think of yourself as both a blade of wheat and a weed whose roots are intertwined. You can't pull up one without also pulling up the other.

Jesus has sown the good seed, which is his Word. This Word proclaims to us the forgiveness of sins that Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection. And this Word has produced a faith that will one day be harvested and finally freed from the wicked weed. But until then, the struggle continues.

The Kingdom of God on earth continues to look like a mixed bag, or a weedy wheat field. God certainly sets limits to the evil that is allowed to persist in the world, but he does not remove it altogether, because he is patient and merciful, both with us, and also with those who have not yet heard and believed his Word.

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So it's true: the Kingdom of God on earth does not look very powerful. Nor does it look very pure. But hidden behind this weakness and impurity is a harvest that God has been preparing all along. And it will finally be revealed on the Last Day, when the saints of God **“will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”** (13:43).

For now we live through sufferings and persecution, both from people or circumstances around us, but even more from the depravity inherent to our own natures. This is simply the reality of this life: wheat and weeds interwoven together, with the weeds oppressing the wheat. So we long for deliverance. And Jesus' parable assures us that it will come. It may not come in this life. And if it does come in this life, it is merely a smaller and temporary deliverance that foreshadows the greater deliverance to come.

So more than anything we look forward to the final and ultimate deliverance that will undoubtedly come when our Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory to judge the living and the dead.

So dear Christian, hope in this—and when I use the word “hope,” I don't mean some wishful thinking, but a sure and certain confidence that is grounded in the reality of Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. Hope in this: that just as Jesus Christ was crucified for our sin and raised from the dead on the third day, so he will also return, as he promised, to raise the dead. Whether we remain alive until that day, or whether we will be raised from the dead, we will be transformed.

“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:51-52)

Wheat and weeds will finally be separated. We long for this. We hope for this. And we pray that the Holy Spirit might preserve us faithful until the end.

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“He who testifies to these things says, ‘**Surely I am coming soon.**’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!  
“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen.” (Rev. 22:20-22)