

"Getting Rid of the Weeds"

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

July 23, 2017

7th Sunday After Pentecost

Despite my obvious agricultural ineptitude which I confessed before you in last week's sermon, I would like to boldly and bravely go down this path of agriculture one more time. However, this time, the two agricultural points I would like to make are easier and more sure than how big an acre is and how many acres homesteaders received. The first point is that, whether you are raising a crop in the field, growing a lawn at your home, or even raising flowers in a flower bed, you want an area that is free of weeds. Weeds can hinder or endanger the growth of good plants. The second point is that, if weeds appear, you want to remove them right away. You do this to protect the good plants.

In order to insure an area free of weeds, you only plant good seeds. That only seems obvious. I don't think any of you would mix in seeds of weeds with the good seed that you plant just in order to test your farming or gardening skills. No, you buy fine seed in order to produce a good crop of wheat, a vibrant lawn, or beautiful flowers. That's all you're concerned about. That's all you want.

Jesus told a parable in which a man did just such a thing. He sowed good seed in his field. He wanted a good crop so he used good seed. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like this. He says that He Himself is the sower. The field is the world, and the good seed is the children of the kingdom.

Jesus has established the kingdom of heaven – that is, the rule or reign of God in the hearts and lives of people – here in this place through the sowing of good seed, the children of the kingdom. These are people who are not good by nature, but whom God has declared to be good and righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus has washed them clean of all their sins through His blood shed on the cross when He offered His life as sacrifice for their sinful lives. He is given them His righteousness in place of their sinfulness. Jesus has given them new life in the kingdom through His resurrection from the dead.

God, the Holy Spirit, gave you the gift of faith in your baptism. He has forgiven all your sins and declared you good and right in His sight. You have Christ's righteousness covering you and you are sons of the kingdom, planted in His field, the world, in order to produce a good crop. Now, wouldn't it be nice to have in this world and even in this church just the good seed of the sons of the kingdom? There would only be those who believed in the Lord and worshiped Him regularly. There would only be those who love their neighbor, not only in word, but in action as well. It would be so peaceful, so joyful, and so enjoyable, much like a field of crops or a garden of flowers without a single weed in it.

Now, anyone who has ever grown anything knows that a field or a flower bed without weeds is impossible. Weeds grow anywhere and everywhere. Weeds (specifically, thorns and thistles) are part of God's curse of creation after Adam and Eve fell into sin. But where do these weeds come from to populate our fields, lawns,

and flowerbeds? We didn't plant them, but they are there. They must come from an outside source, but where? We may not know.

That's not the case in Jesus' parable. When the wheat grew up and produced grain, weeds also grew up. Although the servants of the man don't know where the weeds came from, the man knew. He said, "An enemy has done this." And, of course, he was right. The story had said that an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. The enemy's intent was to destroy the man's crop by infiltrating the wheat seed with weed seed. But this was not just any old weed. The Greek word indicates a weed that looks very much like wheat when growing. It was not until the wheat was ready to bear grain that the servants noticed the weeds. Up until that time, the wheat was growing side-by-side with the wheat look-alike.

This helps us understand the situation in our world and in our church today. In case you haven't noticed, the field of our world and our church is not pure, containing only the sons of the kingdom in it. There are cruel people, hypocritical people, apathetic people, and evil people. This is not the seed which the Lord has sown. It had to come from an outsider. Jesus clearly identifies the Enemy who sows the weeds as the devil and the weeds are the sons of the evil one.

The good seed, the sons of the kingdom, you and me suffer and are hindered by the weeds, the sons of the evil one. The frustrating thing is that the sons of the evil one usually don't look like the sons of the evil one. They are like the weeds in the parable. The weeds, which could hinder and destroy the good seed, looked just like the good seed. In the same way that sons of the evil one often look like the sons of the kingdom. Some people may look like fine outstanding citizens. They are always involved in good and useful projects. They help out in local government, volunteer in their children's school activities, become community leaders, help out with charitable events, and so on. However, in reality, they may be hypocritical, heartless, hurtful people behind closed doors. Some people may look like fine outstanding Christians. They get confirmed, join a congregation, and maintain their name on a membership list. However, in reality, they rarely attend worship service; decline opportunities to serve the Lord and His people; and do not support the ministry of Christ's Church with their gifts.

What's the solution? I'm naturally hesitant to offer any specific advice, given my poor reputation in agriculture. However, I'm guessing that, if farmers see weeds in their fields, they take care of the problem right away. I know that's the case for people who have flower gardens or vegetable gardens. You want to pull the weeds right away before they can choke out and destroy the good seed.

Surprisingly, this is not how the man in Jesus' parable chooses to deal with the situation. His workers are all for pulling the weeds and getting rid of them immediately. However, the man is not in favor of this solution. Why? In their haste and passion to pull up the weeds, the workers might make mistakes and pull up some of the wheat as well. Not only do the weeds look like the wheat, but the weeds are so intertwined with the wheat that the workers might root up the wheat along with the weeds. The man tells his workers to wait until the harvest. At that time, the workers will first gather up

the weeds to be burned and then gather the wheat into his barn. Up until then, the good seed and the weeds are to grow together.

In the same way, our natural desire and way of doing things is much like the workers in the parable. We want to uproot the weeds – the hypocritical, the apathetic, the hurtful, the hateful, and other such sinners – and so purify the church and the world. We usually mean well when we uproot people, although sometimes we may do it purely out of anger and frustration. We believe it's a good idea to separate the sons of the evil one from the sons of the kingdom before the sons of the evil one can cause harm.

But this is not how Jesus chooses to deal with the problem. He says to let the wheat and the weeds – that is, the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one – continue on together and wait for the Last Day. At that time, He will send His angels to gather up all the sinners – or, as He calls them, “causes of sin and all lawbreakers” – and throw them into the fiery furnace. Then the righteous – the sons of the kingdom – will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

This is how we are to handle things as sons of the kingdom living in His field with the sons of the evil one. We are not to attempt to purify the world or the church by plucking out those whom we believe to be sons of the evil one and rendering judgment on them. Although this may frustrate us or infuriate us, there is a real danger of which the parable warns us. In our haste and zealotry to purify, we may actually pluck out those who are sons of the kingdom. This is a risk which our Lord Himself is not willing to take in the parable and the risk which He does not want us to take.

Our Lord also wants to have the opportunity to show mercy. The word of God says, “God, our Savior,... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4) Unlike the workers in the parable and us, whose only desire is to get rid of the weeds, our Lord desires to save the weeds. In fact, He desires that the weeds become wheat.

Agriculturally speaking, even I know that this is not possible in the world of farming. However, in the kingdom of heaven, nothing is impossible for God. Through the same Holy Baptism which planted us in the field; through the same Word of God which gave us faith to live in the field, and through the same Lord's Supper which nourishes us and helps us to grow in the field; God is able to do the impossible and bring wheat out of weeds and, thus, have a greater harvest for the kingdom. Yanking out the weeds now would not afford God this opportunity.

Living among the weeds – the sons of the evil one who may look and act just like us at times – is not easy. We may worry that the weeds will overrun the field. We may become impatient that God is so slow in doing anything. But the word of God reminds us in Peter's second letter, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

The Parable of the Weeds, as it is called, offers a message of warning and of hope. It is a warning against those who are content to only look like Christians and think that God doesn't notice. Lack of punishment does not mean lack of awareness by the Lord. We can be comforted by the fact that He knows what is going on in the

hearts and minds of all people, wheat and weeds alike. Yet He is being mercifully patient. He is allowing time for all to come to repentance and faith.

It is also a message of hope. When things become frustrating and weeds seem to be taking over the field, remember that evil will not continue and the evil one and his offspring will not triumph. There will be an uprooting of the weeds. There will be a final judgment. Just as weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so there will be a time when the sons of the evil one are gathered together and thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And we, the sons of the kingdom, will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord. There will be no more weeds, but only an abundant harvest.

May the Lord grant us patience and hope as we wait for that day to arrive. Amen