

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

August 6, 2017

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 (EHV) – ²⁴He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced heads of grain, the weeds also appeared. ²⁷The servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸He said to them, ‘An enemy did this.’ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?’ ²⁹‘No,’ he answered, ‘because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn.’” ³⁶Then Jesus sent the people away and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” ³⁷He answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the Evil One. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Intro/Theme: What Should We Do About the Weeds?

In last week’s sermon we studied the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. We prayed that the Lord would prepare the soil of our hearts so that we receive the Word in faith and grow in that faith, producing an abundance of fruit. In part of the sermon, we mentioned the thorns or weeds that can easily strangle the good plants. That’s going to be the focus of our study this morning.

The section heading in the Bible calls this *The Parable of the Weeds*, and the simple question we want to answer today is: **WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT THE WEEDS?** First of all, **recognize their source**. Then let’s follow Jesus’ suggestion to **accept their presence**. Finally, **be assured of their destiny**.

Part I: Recognize their source.

A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. Most often, the subject matter of Jesus’ parables was the “kingdom of heaven.” He usually began his stories with the words: **“The kingdom of heaven is like…”** You can think of the kingdom of heaven in two different ways. In one sense, it’s Jesus’ rule in the hearts of his people through the gospel. In another sense, the kingdom of God is actually a picture of believers themselves.

In last Sunday’s sermon, we looked at the growth of the kingdom *internally* – the seed of faith grows in the hearts of believers. Today we’re going to look at the growth of the kingdom *externally* – the people of God grow as they live in the world. The setting of this parable is the same as with *The Sower and the Seed*. Jesus is still teaching the people from that boat, anchored several yards out from shore. Later on, when Jesus explains the parable to his disciples, he’s in a house.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.” With this parable, Jesus doesn’t leave much to the imagination, but eventually explains what everything stands for. **“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man [Jesus]. The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom [believers]. The weeds are the sons of the Evil One [unbelievers]. The enemy who sowed them is the Devil.”**

In recognizing the source of the weeds, there are two ways of looking at it: where they *do* come from and where they *don’t* come from. God’s very nature is that he’s holy and can have nothing to do with evil. He’s not the source or author of evil and he doesn’t tempt anyone to do evil. We also know that God wants every single

person to be saved. From all that, we know without a doubt that the weeds' presence in the field isn't God's doing. Jesus can only sow **"good seed."**

This isn't a truth that sits easily with people. People often question God's love and power because of the prevalence of evil in the world. Someone once made these observations: "Why did God create evil and make a cesspool for us to live in when he knew Satan would make it all go so bad? Why is God such a sadist? He knew we'd fall, but let us do it. He lets 99.5% of us go to hell. He lets people be born with no chance of salvation." We shake our heads at such outlandish comments, but doubting God's love and power is an easier trap to fall into than you might think.

No, the weeds come from the devil. He's the ultimate cause of evil in our world. He caused Adam and Eve to doubt and then disobey God's single command. Because the devil hates God, he has no greater pleasure than to disrupt God's work whenever and wherever he can. His number one goal is to destroy God's kingdom. Wherever Jesus is sowing good seed, the devil is busy sowing weeds.

What exactly characterizes the weeds? This particular word is only used here in the Bible, and a New Testament Greek dictionary gives this definition: **"a particularly undesirable weed resembling wheat and possessing a seed which is poisonous to man and herbivorous animals, producing sleepiness, nausea, convulsions, and even death."** Could the Holy Spirit have chosen a better word to describe the children of the devil? How often don't believers and unbelievers appear identical at first glance! They live next door to each other. They share the same jobs. They wear the same styles of clothing. Their children play soccer and t-ball together. But where God's people produce good fruit, those who belong to the devil are poison. Their false beliefs tire us out, sometimes make us spiritually ill, threaten to shake our faith, and can even kill us if we adopt those teachings as our own.

Before we move on, one of the most comforting things in these opening verses is that Jesus sows good seed in *his* field. If you somehow think that Jesus rules heaven and the devil rules the earth, think again. Jesus said, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [him]."** In Ephesians we hear that **"God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church."** Even though the devil does his wicked work in Jesus domain, that doesn't mean Jesus isn't in complete control, overseeing all things for the good of his Church.

Transition

What should we do about the weeds? We recognize their source. We also accept their presence.

Part II: Accept their presence.

Just to be clear – I'm not saying that we should be happy or content with the weeds' presence. We just accept the fact that good plants and weeds are going to be growing together for a time. **"When the plants sprouted and produced heads of grain, the weeds also appeared. The servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?' He said to them, 'An enemy did this.' The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?' 'No,' he answered, 'because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.'"**

The difference between good wheat and bad weeds is hard to tell at first. It's only when they start coming to a head that you can tell the two apart. Way back in Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* he said the same thing, **"By their fruit you will recognize them."** Good seed produces a good harvest. God's people **"produce fruit in keeping with repentance."** They produce the fruits of the spirit that we talked about last week – a harvest of righteousness. Bad seed produces weeds. Unbelievers produce fruits of unrighteousness. Even though the fruits may appear to be similar, in God's eyes they're nothing alike. Unbelievers always operate with an improper motivation.

When the servants of Jesus see this dangerous mixture, they want to do something about it. We're tempted to take drastic measures and rid the world of the devil's children. On one occasion, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village. Peter was more than ready to fight with a sword of steel rather than the sword of the Word. Jesus, however, says that that's not our responsibility. It'll be taken care of in due time.

The reason Jesus makes this recommendation is because of the wheat. Since the two are growing in such close proximity, and because they look so similar, it could happen that some wheat would be pulled out by mistake. Even though the heads are different, the roots may be intertwined. And which one of us can properly distinguish between unbelievers who will remain unbelievers and unbelievers who will one day believe the Word and become wheat? Out of love for all his elect, Jesus forbids us to cut short anyone's time of grace.

It might be pointed out that Jesus isn't discouraging the use of the keys. Church discipline – calling the sinning brother or sister to repentance – is still to be carried out *within* the church. In this parable, Jesus is speaking about the larger sphere of the world. We also remember that, just because we live among godless people, we don't act like them. We continue to live and confess our faith and flee from sinful ways.

Transition

If we can't do anything about the weeds ourselves, but can only accept their presence, at least we can be assured of their final destiny.

Part III: Be assured of their destiny.

If there's a bright spot in this parable, it's that a day of harvest is coming. There will be a day of separation. **“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn.’ The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”**

As long as this present world stands, there will be both believers and unbelievers living together in the world. But this situation isn't permanent. To give us comfort, Jesus points us to Judgment Day – a day of wrath and mourning for unbelievers, but a day of joy and redemption for us. Then the Lord's servants will gather all people and separate them with perfect precision. The believers will stand on the Lord's right and unbelievers on his left. Those on the left will be cast out of God's presence forever and we who remain will shine like the sun forever. The temptations from devil, world, and flesh that plagued us will be gone. Our bodies will be transformed and glorified and shine with the radiance of Jesus himself. All we can do until that day is trust our Savior's promise and rely on his strength.

Conclusion

What should we do about the weeds? The only thing we can do is patiently wait for the Lord's Day of harvest and ask the Landowner to use us to turn weeds into wheat through the power of his gospel. May God bless us to that end! Amen.