

Sermon Pentecost 7A - Drive-in Worship

All Saints, Mt. Pleasant

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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children 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. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

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Finally! Some good ol’ weeping and gnashing of teeth! I thought we were going to go all summer without hearing any of that. You know me ~ this fire and brimstone preacher just can’t get enough of gnashing of teeth & furnaces of fire!

In truth, us Lutherans are much more comfortable hearing about God’s Grace than God’s judgment. But I’m just going to head off this fiery parable with the reminder that the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” bits appear almost exclusively in the parables of the Gospel of Matthew. So that tells us two things about these fiery literary devices: one, since these are parables, we remember that Jesus is using figures of speech, metaphor and often hyperbole, to get across a point. and two, that they are a figure of speech that Matthew decided would resonate especially well with his particular contemporary audience.

He uses strong language to make a strong point. And the point today is that weeds do not belong among the wheat, they belong in the fire. And that even though the enemy may be at work, judgment

will come, and it belongs solely to God. In today's parable, unlike last week, where the sower scattered valuable seed all over the path & the thorns, this sower at least knows you're only supposed plant seed in the field. And Jesus tells us that although the seed the sower planted was good, an enemy was at work under the cover of darkness, mixing in weeds with the wheat. The weeds begin to sprout up, along with the wheat, and despite the alarm of the farm workers, the sower leaves the weeds to grow until the harvest.

Lest we be left wondering what all this means, the Gospel writer gives us a window into Jesus' private conversation with the disciples, away from the crowds, and we get an explanation of what each of the elements in the story represent. "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man," Jesus says. "and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ...the enemy who sowed them is the devil; and the reapers are angels." So we have the sower, the seeds, the enemy and the reapers. But there is one set of characters in this parable that goes undefined. Can you find it? The slaves.

The one who plants the seed is the Son of Man, the ones who bring in the harvest are the Angels, but who are the ones who tend to the fields, as the seeds take root, sprout and grow? It's the slaves. So who, in this parable, do the slaves of the master represent? Jesus doesn't even bother to explain it - Because it's us. It's the very disciples listening to him speak. They know, in this scenario, that when it comes to the work of God's harvest in the world, they are the laborers, they are the workers, they are the ones called servants of God, tending to and caring for the growth of the children of God.

And they're the ones in this parable, keeping watch over the Master's field. And once the weeds began to spring up with the wheat, "the slaves of the householder came and say" "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" And the answer is, "An enemy has done this." An enemy has put obstacles in the way of kingdom growth stumbling blocks in the way of God's work. Someone sees this new crop of wheat as a threat, and they are doing their best to choke it out.

Then the slaves go on to ask, "Do you want us to go and gather them?" But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.' No, says the Master. The good will grow in spite of the bad. The presence of these obstacles will not stop The kingdom's spread. In spite of these weeds, Roots will reach deeper, Shoots will rise higher, and trust me - in the end, good fruit will be harvested. So no, it is the job of the servants to worry about the weeds. It is our job simply to tend to the wheat. Because trying to attack those we identify as evil will only serve to damage the good.

Aw, Lord - are you sure? Are you sure we can't get out there and pull just a few weeds? They so clearly don't belong here. They are so clearly wrong when we're trying to do right. Please, Lord. Can't we just cast a little righteous judgment on those ugly, unfit weeds? Playing the part of the judge can feel so good. Vilifying the "others" we identify as enemies can come so naturally to us "insiders." But it's not our job Jesus makes it clear that it is not the call of the servants of God to spend our time playing judge, to use our efforts rooting the weeds. Jesus makes it clear that righteous judgment will come, but it is not ours, but God's alone.

This week, our nation lost civil rights icon and Presidential Medal of Freedom winner John Lewis. In addition to being a United States Congressman, he devoted his life to the pursuit of racial justice and equity. As a young man in the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, Lewis had the honor of meeting Rosa Parks and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and as a student he became one of the thirteen original Freedom Riders. The core of the movement Lewis grew to become so integral to was peaceful, nonviolent resistance to the injustices keeping Black and brown Americans from truly living free. After Lewis was attacked during a Freedom Ride in Rock Hill, SC, two weeks later, he was boarding a bus to ride again. “We were determined not to let any act of violence keep us from our goal,” Lewis said.

When he and his cohorts were met with baseball bats and lead pipes, they persevered. When dogs and firehoses were turned on them, they kept on marching. Their goal was to give voice to the voiceless to advocate for justice, equity and peace, and no obstacle or stumbling block would impede their way. Their hearts were laser-focused - keep moving forward. Don't be distracted by antagonists. Don't be deterred by threats. Don't even let violence stop the momentum of progress. In the words of today's parable: “Don't worry about the weeds - The Master already has a plan for them - Instead, continue to tend to the wheat. Provide nourishment for the hungry Give drink to the thirsty, And facilitate growth, freedom and justice for all to the glory of the Father and his reign of love.

As we saw in the growth of the Civil Rights movement, that singularity of focus on what was right, despite the dogged persistence of the wrong, not only kept the movement alive, but directly contributed to its exponential growth. When others see us continuing to patiently tend the seeds of righteousness, despite the weeds of injustice springing up all around you, they want to become a part of the work too, to get their hands dirty toiling for the growth of the kingdom. Even when it's tempting to get stuck in the weeds...even when it's so tempting to start pointing fingers and calling names, and participating in the ugly, nasty, and oh-so-satisfying political blame-game, that will only do harm to yourself. Stick to your calling, Jesus says. Just keep tending the wheat, Jesus says. Just keep on loving, and feeding, and teaching and healing... and leave the rest up to me.

In the words of the late Congressman John Lewis: “Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won...And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”