

Pentecost 8A (Proper 11)

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

July 23, 2023

We find ourselves in the middle of three Sundays where the Gospel features three parables our Lord used to teach about the kingdom of heaven. Last Sunday, in the parable of the Sower and the Seed, we heard how the kingdom is bestowed. This Sunday, in the parable of the Weeds among the Wheat, we hear how the kingdom operates. And next Sunday we will hear how the kingdom is acquired.

I wanted to highlight the connections of these 3 Sundays of parables about the kingdom because today's stands in sharp contrast to last week's. As we heard last week, yes, God's Word always works. What we find when we examine today's parable is perhaps perplexing. Just consider it... We would desire nothing more than to live in a field with nothing but wheat. No matter which way you turn, there isn't a single evil weed in sight. Now contrast that desire with reality. Yes, Jesus told us that his Word works, but what is the Christian to do when living as wheat among evil weeds?

As we contemplate the life of the Christian in this world, perhaps we might think God should just take care of everything evil right now and right quick. But today, God's answer shocks us. He says wait. "Let both grow together until the harvest?" That's your plan, God? Are you sure about that? Are you sure it wouldn't be better to get rid of all the evil now? Surely that would be better? Since you are God and you are good, why not just remove everything that causes people to sin and everyone who continues to sin and make it better? Wouldn't that be better than the way things are now? God, you know what it's like to live as a Christian in the world. You know how believers are treated. You know how your church is mocked and ridiculed. Maybe you should use believers in your church to root out all the evil. Are you sure about this waiting business?

Let's consider Jesus' parable as he defines what life is like in his kingdom right now, even as he directs our eyes to the time where the problem of evil will be eternally solved.

Jesus identifies himself as the One who sows good seed in the field of the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. They are believers. The enemy, the Devil, is the one who sows bad seed. The weeds are the sons of the Devil. They are unbelievers. The servants asked the One who sowed the seeds, "Didn't you sow good seeds in the field? Where did the weeds come from?" Jesus told them that the Devil came and sowed evil seeds. The servants thought it would be best to get rid of the weeds right away but Jesus responded, "No, because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest." Jesus reveals that he has a plan for all the evil in the world. He has a plan to separate the wheat and weeds...it is just not yet. On Judgment Day, the angels will sort it all out. Weeds to fire and wheat to shine as the righteous sons of God.

But what about now? We're seemingly stuck waiting. What will the Christian do? What will he think? How will she live? It almost seems hopeless, doesn't it? There is no lack of evil weeds around. They sprout here, there and everywhere. Those weeds are hounding Christians and the church, attacking the Scriptures, calling evil good and good evil. Evil weeds in the form of godless ideologies and false beliefs seek to unravel God's good order for sexuality and family. Even in the name of the Church Satan maliciously sows his evil seeds which end up having their roots intertwined with the wheat.

How is the Christian to deal with all these weeds? We need to eradicate them, right? We need to root them out, right? Jesus says no. And we want to respond, "What kind of plan is that, Jesus? What kind of proposed solution to this problem is that? Do you really think the best way to go is to let both grow together until the harvest? You propose to let those who sin against to go on living without consequence? You want your church to undergo ridicule, persecution and the threat of being silenced? You want these weeds to keep growing? Is this really the solution Jesus? To continue to let the wheat and weeds grow together?"

No. That's not the solution. That's not Jesus' answer. That's not Jesus' plan. Jesus is just describing the field as it is today. He is describing what life here on earth will be like for the Christian. Jesus indeed has a plan to get rid of and eradicate every evil weed. He has a plan to remove every wicked thing that stands in opposition to Christians and church. In fact, he has workers standing at the ready to get rid of everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. But those workers aren't us and that time is not yet. Listen, ***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. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.***

Wait for the harvest. God is going to fix the problem of evil weeds. It might not be today. It might not be tomorrow. God might seem slow in keeping his promises, but he is never late.

So then what does God want us to do while we wait? He wants you to live as wheat, even if you're in a field of weeds. He wants you to live as wheat, serving the purpose for which he has planted you. That means being faithful, fruitful and mindful of the coming harvest.

The other two readings today offering holy insight on what it means for the Christian to live as wheat among weeds. Isaiah's striking words proclaim the exclusive nature of the one, true and only God. In the titles of the true God, we hear God's answer to evil in this world and his answer to living as what among weeds. He is called LORD with four capital letters. This is the God of free and faithful grace. This is the Savior God. This is the One who forgives your sins. Based on nothing except the desire of his heart, he has saved you. For all of those times when if someone looked at you and saw not wheat but a weed, he has washed your weedy sins away. He is called King of Israel which refers to his relationship with his people. As the perfect King, he provides for you and he protects you. The presence of evil in the world doesn't mean that God doesn't care for you. We see that when he calls himself Redeemer. That title reminds us that his care for you was so great that he was willing to pay the ultimate ransom price to purchase you as his very own and plant you as good seed in his kingdom. If he has loved you like that, with such a great price tag attached, he certainly still loves you regardless of how life in this broken and sinful world feels like. After reminding us that he wants what is best for you and gave everything for you to make you his own, he calls himself the Lord Almighty, the commander of heaven's armies. No amount of wickedness is more powerful than him and because of that he invites you to trust him as he says, "I am the first and I am the last." Your God ruled in eternity before the world was even made, before it was made evil and he will reign forever after every bit of wickedness is purged into hell. He names himself Rock, your refuge and safety in this evil world.

Paul offers valuable revelation about what a Christian should think about the problem of evil in the world. Jesus' parable could appear to give the impression that the master doesn't care that much about the ungodliness and wickedness of the world. It could seem to be telling us that to wait for the harvest is to give blatant approval of wickedness, or at the very least permission of wickedness. But this is not the case as Paul reveals. Just because God tells us to wait for the harvest doesn't mean that he is ambivalent about evil. God gives every person on earth a testimony about himself through creation. That natural knowledge of God is an invitation by God for man to learn the aspects of God that can only be given by the revelation of the Scriptures. But the wicked of the world has taken what God has given and exchanged it for a lie. When mankind seeks to be liberated from God, they exchange wisdom for folly. So God gives something else. This time God gave them over to their desires. While we wait for the harvest, God does not. He is taking away every excuse.

And now hear the glorious end to the wait to which your Savior calls you, ***Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.***