

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11)  
July 19, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, last week we heard the Parable of the Sower as Jesus was speaking to great crowds from a boat. In that parable, coupled with Jesus' explanation of the parable, we learned that the sower is God, the seed being sown is the Word of God, and the soil is us. And we emphasized both the soil's impact on the seed and the seed's ability to impact the soil, because the Word of God always accomplishes His purpose for which it was sent. That means transforming bad soil into good soil by the working of the Holy Spirit to bring us to and strengthen our faith.

But this week, Jesus mixes His metaphors. There seems to be no break in the period of time when Jesus was telling these parables. It is the same crowds hearing them. So right after Jesus gives His explanation of one parable, He goes into a new one, but with different meanings for some of the same things in this one. If you find yourself a bit confused while hearing this one after just starting to make sense of the last one, you're not alone. The disciples also were struggling. After Jesus talks a bit more and then goes into the house with the disciples, they ask Him that good old Lutheran question. What does this mean?

And He explains to them. This parable has two sowers. One is the Son of Man; the other is the devil. There are two types of seed. But this time it's not the Word of God. The two seeds are the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one. (Although we do keep in mind that the sons of the kingdom are only the sons of the kingdom because they have the Word of God.) The harvest is judgment day. But until that day both wheat and weeds, sons of the Kingdom and sons of the evil one, will grow up alongside each other.

The weeds (or tares) of this parable are darnel, a certain type of ryegrass familiar to 1<sup>st</sup> century farmers. In the absence of our modern harvesting machines and our genetically engineered weed killers, one could only look for weeds among the crops and pluck them up. Now you should know something about these weeds. These aren't the thistles or dandelions we find in grassy yards. These aren't twisty, thorny growths. They grow up alongside the wheat. They look a lot like the wheat. They grow like wheat. It would be very difficult for many to see the difference in them before the time comes for them to start bearing their grain.

You may have had the kind of trouble this parable is talking about in your own life. With *obvious* weeds in your own garden or flower bed, as you pull up the obvious weeds, there is a chance that some of the good comes up along with them as you find that their roots are tangled together. Now imagine that it isn't so obvious. The weeds and the good plants all look the same. If a person came along thinking they were pulling up a weed, they might later find that they had pulled up the good things instead.

To sow bad seed, the kind in our parable, in someone else's field is a great act of intentionality and of patience. The sower of bad seed would have to first dedicate his own resources to this hateful act. He would have to grow his own harvest of weeds to gather their seeds. Then he would have to wait until the next planting season, storing this seed of sabotage. It's a long-term commitment to evil, to disruption, to harming the good farmer's reputation...and his crop. It's certainly the work of an evil one. Indeed, in this earthly story with a heavenly meaning, we find from Jesus' words that it is the act of *the Evil One*.

So, what's the point? What's in this parable for us? What should we take away from it in our modern age? Use only RoundUp ready seeds? Setup security cameras and fences around our fields to prevent wicked neighbors from sabotaging our crop? Well many of us are not farmers. So that's no help. And it's not even the point.

The point is establishing expectations—understanding what things look like in the kingdom of Heaven, in the rule and reign of Jesus Christ, as we wait for His return.

One of the most common things heard at a funeral—it's almost always said by *someone* attending—is that "she (or he) was such a good person." There is often little doubt as we are confronted by death that the deceased is in paradise. At least, that's how we talk. After all, it's improper to speak ill of the dead. And in the face of discomfort as we are confronted by the wages of sin, we want to think happy thoughts. So, we focus on all the good a person did in life. Although it does happen in some situations, very rarely will we say, "he or she was so rotten that eternal judgment awaits them." We might reserve that for the evil dictators

of history, but certainly not for our family and friends.

The reality is that when we get to the new creation, we probably will be surprised by the people we see there with us enjoying eternal life in the presence of our King...and equally surprised by the people we don't see there with us.

Jesus is speaking an eternal truth. If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck and talks like a duck, well, it may not be a duck at all.

We like to think that we can identify those who are Christian by the stellar conduct of their lives. And yet, it is precisely the nature of a Christian that he or she is a sinner redeemed by grace. That means that there are many times when a Christian may look like a non-Christian. At the same time there are many who look Christian by their outward acts. They'll feed the poor, clothe the naked, treat the wounded and sick. But in their hearts, they worship false gods, whether one of the many named ones out there or simply the unholy internal trinity of me, myself, and I.

I can think of no better example than Judas Iscariot. If you and I didn't know about the events of Holy Week, we would think of Judas as a model Christ follower. He was among the twelve when Jesus sent them out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He proclaimed the kingdom with the rest of them. He cast out demons with the rest of them. He even held the position of treasurer. That is how much the other disciples trusted him. They did not realize that he was a weed among the wheat until he betrayed Jesus.

The early Church had weeds also. Much of the reason for the letters of St. Paul is because of weeds in the congregations sowing conflict and false teachings all while looking like wheat in many ways. And the modern Church and world are no different. Even in our own denomination, and possibly in our own congregation, weeds may spring up. Martin Luther put it this way: "Wherever God builds a church, [the devil] builds his chapel or tabernacle next to it." Or to keep in line with the parable. Wherever God sows His good seed, Satan will sow bad seed. This will be the reality until Harvest Day. Satan wants nothing more than to damage God's reputation and God's crop.

Now, at this point, the little Pharisee that is in all of us might have started speaking to you, and you may be thinking, *"I think I might know some potential bad seed. They say they are Christians, but I've seen them out in the community. I've seen their posts on Facebook. Maybe I should call down thunder upon them. Maybe I should pluck them up."* But remember, wheat sometimes looks like weeds just as much as the weeds look like wheat. If we are lackadaisical, neglecting our obligation to share the Word, we may allow the weeds to further influence and damage the wheat. At the same time, if we are pharisaical and legalistic, we may end up plucking up not a weed, but simply weaker wheat. Only God can rightly separate the good from the bad. Our job is to be wheat, to bear good fruit, or in this case grain, to proclaim all of God's Word, His warnings and judgments as well as His promises and blessings.

Also, at this point, if you take God's Word seriously, and you take your own sin and your own salvation seriously, there is also the chance that the question has at least started to form in your mind, *"what about me? I want to be the good seed. But I know my sins. Am I actually the bad seed Jesus is speaking about? If I were the good seed, why can't I stop sinning? If I am wheat, why do I keep giving in to that one particular temptation?"*

In both cases we must remember that the essential difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not the quality of life lived. Rather it is that the Christian confesses their sin finding righteousness in Christ, while the non-Christian confesses his own righteousness, and yet stands before Christ a sinner.

Again, we remember that the sons of the kingdom are only sons of the kingdom because they have the Word of God. As you and I gather today around God's Word and Sacrament, we look like wheat. As we leave here, there may be times when we look like weeds. But the difference is not found in outward appearances. Those can be deceiving. And it isn't found in feelings. Doubt often betrays us. The difference is found in what God has declared you to be.

When He poured His baptismal waters over you, He declared you to be His own good seed. He has promised to continue to nourish you and take care of you even as the bad seed is sown and grows up around you. And He promises to continue helping you grow until the day of Harvest, when you will be gathered up with all the wheat of old into His barn where you will shine like the sun in His kingdom. He is faithful. And He will bring it to pass. Amen.