

**The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost • July 17, 2011**

*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*

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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (Romans 8:18-27)

"Seeds"

[Retelling of parable illustration]

More seeds. If you were with us last weekend, you might recall that seeds turned up in Jesus' parable of the Sower. They play a part in today's Gospel, too, as we've heard. The people in the crowds that heard Jesus tell these parables were probably more familiar with agriculture than the average person in our congregation today, so a bit of background information here might be helpful. It makes sense that someone would plant wheat – good seed. But what's the deal with the weeds? The seeds that the enemy sowed in the householder's field weren't just any scraggly weeds. Jesus is quite probably referring to a particularly pesky plant, darnel. As it grows, darnel looks very similar to wheat, so much so that you can't clearly see the difference between the two until they bear fruit and the ear appears on the plant. With wheat, a heavy, brown ear makes the plant bend down. Darnel, however, has a much lighter-weight, black ear which lets the stalks keep upright. The weed is so similar to the wheat that it's sometimes referred to as "false wheat." What really set the two kinds of plants apart for the farmer in Jesus' time, though, was the uselessness of the darnel: its seeds are poisonous and unfit for use. You wouldn't want these darnel weeds growing in your field. **It's a problem that needs to be addressed.**

As Matthew shared it with us, Jesus was telling this parable of the "weeds of the field" to two different audiences. He gives the parable itself to the crowds who have come to hear him speak, to see what this Jesus of Nazareth is all about. The main thrust of the parable comes after the description of the situation when the servants ask their master, "Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?" and the master answers, "No, leave them be for now. I'll have this taken care of when harvest time comes." The servants are inclined to go and try to fix the problem immediately, but the master of the house has a different plan, one that probably sounded odd to those people in the crowds that had come to listen to Jesus. Some of them probably did understand that Jesus wasn't just talking about agricultural problem-solving. Indeed, Jesus wasn't trying to turn the crowds away with this parable; rather, he was encouraging them to stay with him. Even though they weren't expecting the kingdom of God as Jesus was bringing it into their lives, God Himself was still at work. Jesus pointed people to the truth that the Master – the Lord their God – has a plan, even if they aren't seeing it at the time.

The second audience for this parable, we heard, was a much smaller group. Jesus reserved the explanation of the parable for his disciples. Inside that house, he obliged their request to reveal the parable's meaning – but do you notice that Jesus' explanation has a different focus than the parable itself? He doesn't expand on the central point of his illustration (the master's decision to leave the weeds in the field) but instead shifts to what will happen when the harvest times comes. What's going on here? Why does Jesus want the people who follow him to focus on the end of the age, what we would call the Last Day?

You know that the world isn't perfect. The poison of the evil one is still around, today as it was in the disciples' day. Enemies of God deny His existence and authority. They say that Jesus was not the Son of God, not divine, not the Savior. They call you, his follower, a fool, and reject the notion of sin, let alone any forgiveness that God would offers through His Son. Confronted by the reality of evil and the brokenness of the world, you might be feeling the **seeds of doubt and fear** taking root in your mind and heart. **Why doesn't God take care of the problem of evil immediately?** Why doesn't He fix it now?

In Jesus' parable, you recall, the master keeps his servants from going out and fix the problem of the weeds by rooting them up immediately, before the time of the harvest. You might feel like you want to do the same. If you could just fix people, if you could just fix the economy, if you could just fix the evil in the world, it'd all be better. But is that how things work? Another illustration might help us get at this question. We live in a pixilated culture, where our laptop computers, flatscreen TVs, and smartphones relay information through fields of colored pixels, tiny blocks of color that, when woven together with thousands of other pixels, display pictures and text. Now imagine for a moment that, as you look at your favorite pixel-powered device, you notice a tiny blank square on the screen: a dead pixel. Upon closer inspection, you might see one or two others that just stay black, never shifting as they should. And once you've noticed them, they stand out plainly. You loose focus on the thousands of other pixels and zero-in on the dead ones. You have a pixel problem. Would you, then, lay your device out on a table and take it apart in order to pull out and fix those bad bits of that tightly-woven display, then put the whole thing back together again? I know that if I were to attempt such a fix, I'd be impressed if *any* of the remaining pixels still worked – if I was even able to turn the thing back on in the first place. **We can't fix the problem of evil; even if we tried, we would likely harm the wheat along with the weeds.** The world isn't going to get any better until the day of harvest, when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness.

Jesus' parable tells us about the coming of the kingdom of God, how He is working in the world. Even as Jesus put it, God's kingdom is already in the world: He is already about His work, even though Jesus' audience didn't expect the kind of kingdom that he was bringing with him. The cross wasn't the fix that they'd been expecting, either. Like us, they were looking for God to fix the problem of evil immediately. But instead, God's answer to their expectation seems to be "Wait for it." God is at work, even though his timing is not based in our expectations. Yet even so, God's timing is for our benefit. **The Master has a plan, and it will all be set right in the end.**

When the disciples came to Jesus for an explanation, he responded to their need by telling them how everything will play out. Certainly, only the Lord can declare what is to come, what will happen. He alone knows everything that has occurred and everything that could occur. Jesus points his disciples and us to the certain outcome of the day of the harvest, when God will fix the problem of evil, as the householder would fix the problem of the weeds. Paul echoes the assurance that Jesus gives, commending the glory that Christ's people will know, glory that will have you shining like the sun as futility yields to hope. **Jesus plants the seeds of trust and hope in you as you follow him**, the same seeds that he would plant in the hearts of his disciples two thousand years ago. Those seeds will give you roots in patience as you live out your faith, because you will be supported by the Holy Spirit, your intercessor, who "intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

Your hope lies not in what is seen in this imperfect and evil world, where weed and wheat grow up together. And although your hope may wait beyond what you can see, your Savior has already seen it. So, when you look around at this field that is the world, even in the midst of its brokenness, look ahead. As the seeds of trust and hope grow in you, look ahead to the fulfillment of God's promises that will be yours – in Jesus – on that day of harvest.

Amen.