



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Another great parable from Jesus this morning. If you were here last Sunday, you might remember that our definition of a parable is a simple story using concrete imagery to make a single point. In the case of Jesus, he is trying to teach the disciples about the Kingdom of God.

Today, we have another plant parable: Weeds and wheat. Only this time we are not going to talk about what it means to sow seed in good soil, but rather how a particular someone might, sow weed seeds in a newly planted field. As both seeds grow together, it will be impossible to pull out the weeds without disturbing the good wheat. So, what do we do? Such a dilemma! We let them grow together until the harvest. Please note that the Kingdom of God is filled with both weeds and wheat. Often times, even if you put them side by side you cannot always tell the difference.

Three things about this parable are good to note. First, what I read this week was that in Jesus' day it was unfortunately a common practice to throw weed seed in a neighbor's wheat or corn or barley field to get back at them for who knows what. After it happened so often there was even a law made to hopefully stop neighbors from such a deed.

Secondly, people in Jesus' day used bearded darnel seed to mess with an enemy's field. This particular plant is hard to distinguish from wheat until the kernels come to a head.

And thirdly, to make matters worse, the bearded darnel seeds reap a grain that is often poisonous. So much so, that at harvest you had to be very careful to make sure it did not get mixed in with the good wheat.

So, now that we know this, what we are supposed to do if such a thing were to happen to us. Jesus tells us that we should, "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." That seems pretty straight forward, doesn't it? Simple story, concrete image, and a simple point. How does this simple story then apply to

us today? Could it be that we have a parable about judgment here?

The simple point is that judging others is a sin all its own. Those that judge others of being unworthy to reap the harvest of God are then sinful in their own right. It is very much like playing God and deciding for ourselves who should be allowed into the Kingdom of God and who should not. I have always said that that sort of judgment is way above my pay grade, but yet I sometimes do it anyway. In my head, I am pretty good at separating the goats from the sheep, the saints from the sinners, and the good guys from the bad guys.

Even though we consciously try to not judge, it is difficult. Unconsciously, I think, we practice selective evangelism. We pick and choose who we want to be part of our church, part of our inner circle. We pick those that are usually most like us. One thing here at Christ the Servant that we do is to select or should I say hand pick council members. We tend to pick people we like, people we know will not rock the boat too much, etc.

Here is a story I would like you to think about told by a pastor in Texas. There was a couple who came to a church. They dropped by the church midweek looking for a janitorial job. The pastor told them they did not have money to hire a custodian, but that he would love to have them come to worship. Lo and behold, the next Sunday they did. And they came back, Sunday after Sunday, and then, one day, they joined the church. And, as far as the pastor was concerned, they were great members. They tithed their income, they cleaned the church for free, and when the congregation decided to sponsor a refugee, they were the first to invite those folks into their home. The problem was this couple did not look like the rest of the congregation. They were a little rough around the edges. And being honest, they did not smell like the rest of the congregation. And that made a lot of folks uncomfortable. The long-time members were polite at first, but then they began to ostracize this new couple in subtle ways. When there was a pot-luck supper at the church, their dish would hardly be touched. And when small groups of members got together for a picnic, they were never invited. Well, you can imagine what happened. In time, they dropped out. They fell by the wayside and quit coming, and no one made any attempt to ask them why.

I have felt like that before when I joined a particular Lutheran church in Hartford. After the children were baptized at the church and they were old enough, I faithfully took them to Sunday School each week and often times we attended worship after Sunday school. One day, I realized that I was not being fed and began to look for a new church. The kids called it church shopping. That is when I happened on St Olaf in Rubicon. The first week we were there, the kids found friends and I talked with the pastor and felt right at home, like I had known him my whole life. We stayed and became members. It was that pastor that encouraged me on my faith journey. Some of you have met him, Pastor Larry. But no one, no one, ever called me from the other Lutheran church to see where my kids were even though for years, they had had perfect attendance. No one wanted to know why they were missing from Sunday school or why we were not coming to worship or even turning in our giving envelope.

Has something like this ever happened to you? Can you relate? I was so happy to find my new church family, but I still felt bad that those at the other Lutheran church never cared about Leigh and Frank.

This is the lesson to learn from this parable. The kingdom of God is a mixed bag. It is not always clear who is the wheat and who is the weed. And so, we should not take the judging upon ourselves. God calls us to love one another like Jesus loved us. He did not say to only love those we judge to be good wheat, good Christians.

Another part of this lesson is that sometimes we are wheat and sometimes we are the weed. That would be a Martin Lutherism, if that is a word. None of us is ever completely weed or wheat, a saint, or a sinner. Because of our humanness we are capable of being both saint and sinner even at the same time.

The best story to illustrate is one I think I talked about 5 or 6 years ago, but it remains one of my favorites. Some of you might remember it. One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two 'wolves' inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather; "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "the one you feed".

The evil wolf or the good wolf is fed daily by the choices we make with our thoughts and our actions. So which one will you feed? It is possible that people do not know that they have a choice. God gave us free will and from there we are free to make lots of choices in this life. We just had this Romans reading a week or so ago. Chapter 7 verse 15, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Some days I long to have peace in my soul, and I pray that it will be found with God in eternal heaven.

And speaking of Heaven, there is another piece of our lesson, that all will be judged in the end. Scary thought, I know. In fact, that thought always reminds me of our Friday morning Bible study group that gathered when I first came to CTS. No matter the topic, the question always came up, "Am I good enough to go to heaven?" We all know that we get to heaven not by our deeds, but by our faith in Jesus. And of course, that does not mean that we should not try to be wheat in the world.

The hope of our Savior is that when we grow in the knowledge of God's love, we humbly seek Him and his will for our lives. We then begin to reflect the image of God in which we were created. Although our human sinfulness never goes completely away, it becomes fainter in the light of God's love. His harvest is always plentiful, and we have the bread of life to feast on until we are called home. Oh, and by the way, God uses everything for his purpose. The Greeks found that even the bearded darnel weed could do some good as it had a medicinal quality.

In God's sight nothing is useless, nothing is lost. Even the dastardly deed of a vengeful neighbor can serve a useful purpose. Thanks be to God that All things work together for good in His Kingdom. AMEN