

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 10, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' "...Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They 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. He who has ears, let him hear. (NIV)

Growing up in the Midwest in the middle of a farming community almost everyone had a garden. Even though my parents were teachers and not farmers we too had a nice size garden. While my parents gave me plenty of chores to do in and around the house one responsibility that was quickly taken away from me was pulling weeds in the garden. I'll tell you why. One afternoon my mom asked me to go pull out all the weeds from the garden and she emphasized *all* of them so I wouldn't cut any corners as some kids tend to do. So I made sure I pulled every last weed before I went out front to play some basketball. I still remember my mom's cry I heard very clearly from all the way in the back yard. "*What did you do?! What happened to all of my new plants?*" Yes, that day I lost the job of pulling weeds from the garden anymore.

Dear friends, as Jesus teaches us this parable comparing the world to one big field, we will also clearly see Jesus has removed us from the responsibility of pulling up the weeds. While it may sound a bit strange to those of you who like to keep a nice and healthy garden, Jesus tells us to let the weeds and the wheat grow together. Jesus understands living with weeds will not always be easy for the wheat. But Jesus also has set a day for the harvest. Until that day I pray we keep listening to and following the word of our Savior - the word that teaches us today to: **Live as Wheat among the Weeds.**

This is the second of seven parables Jesus teaches in Matthew chapter 13. The first four Jesus spoke from a boat while people listened from the shore. The last three Jesus spoke to His disciples in a house. With this parable Jesus spoke it from the boat and gave

the explanation of the parable to his disciples in the house. The fact that Jesus explains exactly what is meant by this parable makes my work much easier this morning.

Jesus describes God's saving activity in this world as a man, Jesus, who sowed good seed in His field, which is the world. It produces "*sons of the kingdom*" or in other words believers in Christ Jesus. But an enemy, the devil, came at night when everyone was sleeping and sowed weeds who are "*sons of the evil one*" or in other words unbelievers. The Greek word here describes a weed that looks very similar to wheat, especially before the wheat becomes mature. When faithful servants recognized weeds appearing among the wheat they come and ask: '*Do you want us to go and pull them up?*' Now listen carefully to the answer because it teaches us a valuable lesson. "*No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.*"

Please understand first of all what Jesus is not teaching in this parable. Jesus is not contradicting Himself regarding the discipline the church is to carry out. God wants us to call sinners to repentance and even remove them from our fellowship if they persist in sin, false teaching, or unbelief. This is not what Jesus is teaching. This parable is talking about the world – not the church. The world holds both belief and unbelief. When as people of God we start to think it is our responsibility to rid this world of unbelievers listen to this parable where God speaks an emphatic "No!" Christ would tell us to put the sword away. The tragedies like the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, or attempts today to terrorize and kill others in the name of God are not God-pleasing. Although the sons of the evil one may cause us sons of the kingdom grief and pain, even though they might mock and trample on all we hold dear, despite the fact they will continue to be constant thorns in our sides, God does not give to His church on earth the responsibility to pull up the weeds.

God even gives us a reason for letting both weeds and wheat grow together: "*because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.*" God's concern is for the wheat. That is why God continues to preserve this earth. He is still waiting for the full harvest to be ready. By pulling out the weeds we might also destroy some of the wheat by mistake. After all, I know from experience that plants and weeds can look a lot alike! It is not the job of the church to end anyone's time here on earth – a person's time of grace.

So what is the job Christ has given to His Church? He has entrusted us with a far different kind of sword – the one called the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Jesus has given us the wonderful responsibility of preaching the good news to all creation. We are to spread the gospel. We are to tell others about a God who loves us so much He gave us His Son. We are to speak of a righteousness that comes not from the law but through faith in Christ Jesus. We are to lift high the cross – where all our sin was laid on Jesus. We are to point to the empty tomb as all the proof we need that our enemies (sin, death and the devil) are defeated. We are, at Christ's command, to go and baptize all nations and teach them everything His Word has to say. And we are to live as wheat among the weeds. As the wheat grows and matures it starts to stick out so that it can be recognized from the weeds. So too Christ wants us to grow in faith so that we stick out in this world.

Again this will not always be easy, especially when we are growing side by side among the weeds. The deceitfulness of wealth and worldly pleasures will keep trying to choke our faith and make us unfruitful. The enemy, the devil, is still lurking in the

darkness wanting to devour us. We keep tripping and stumbling over our own sinful selves so much so that when we look in the mirror we too look an awful lot like the weeds! That is why we want not just to preach the gospel but to keep listening to the gospel. Then you get to hear once again your Savior and your God speak to you. ***“Take heart, your sins are forgiven.”*** (Matthew 9) ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*** (Isaiah 43) ***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*** (Galatians 3)

As children of God, as sons of the kingdom, as wheat living in this world among the weeds we listen to and follow the word of our Savior. This word tells us today to ***“Let both grow together until the harvest.”*** At that time on the Last Day there will be no mistakes about the difference between the wheat and weeds. The angels will be the harvesters. ***“They will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They 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. He who has ears, let him hear.”*** This is something beyond what we can even imagine – to live in a place with no more weeds – no more sin. What a sight that will be when Jesus returns and takes us home where we will shine like the sun in His heavenly kingdom!

But for now remember Jesus’ parable today. Our job isn’t to pull up the weeds – we will leave that for the angels. Instead, we will live as the wheat Jesus has made us even as we are surrounded by weeds. Amen.