



Pentecost 7-July 19, 2020

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

## “Gathering the Children”

- Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

*Jesus is given several titles in scripture which describe who he is. One Sunday, each year we celebrate Jesus as the Good Shepherd because Jesus protects his flock of wandering sheep. Jesus is also described as the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus was present at the beginning of time when his father spoke all things into existence, and he will be present to call his children into his kingdom on the last day. Jesus is named the Author of your faith. You cannot have faith without Jesus first creating*

*faith in you. Other names of Jesus include Immanuel, the bread of Life, the chief cornerstone, the bridegroom, the sower, and the list goes on. In today’s parable, Jesus is not given a title and he certainly wouldn’t receive the title of “Master Gardener. If you want your garden or field to grow well and have a good harvest, everyone knows you get rid of the weeds. You don’t sit back and let your crop struggle as the weeds grow together.*

*But this is what Jesus tells his disciples to do as he tells them the parable of the wheat and the weeds. As Jesus tells the parable about someone sowing good seeds and an enemy sowing weeds while everyone was sleeping, you might think the slaves should have been rewarded for their eagerness to clean up the field by uprooting the weeds so the good seed would grow easier without the competition of the weeds. I think this is the conclusion that many of us would have in this parable as well. Wouldn’t Jesus like our help by sorting out some evil in this world so other’s faith can grow without competing with what the devil has planted? Jesus would turn down our help just as quickly as he did the slave that offered to lend a hand in pulling weeds the enemy had planted in the field. Weeding out all causes of sin is a job that Jesus does not give to you and I and he waits until the harvest to do the unrooting.*

*You can at least appreciate the interest the disciples had in this parable as they wanted an explanation from Jesus. The disciples are even more confused about this parable as they were when they asked Jesus to explain the parable of the sower. Jesus sits his disciples down in the house to speak more about this parable, but he never actually explains this parable to his confused disciples. Jesus clearly identified who is who and what was what in the parable. Jesus declared that he is the one who sowed the good seed in the parable. The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one. The devil is the one who planted the weeds. The harvest is the end of the age. The reapers are the angels. The disciples seemed to be satisfied with the explanation that Jesus gave since they didn’t ask any more questions.*

*It seems that Jesus has cleared up all the questions about this parable. Jesus identifies everyone in the parable except the slaves who wanted to become master gardeners.*

*When Jesus ended his parable he said, "Let anyone with ears listen!" None of the disciples admitted hearing that they were possibly the slaves in the parable who wanted to sort the good wheat from the bad weeds. The desire to help Jesus sort the children of his kingdom from the children of the evil one is a temptation that all of us fall into. The disciples and you and I often want to combine the parable of the sower with the parable of the wheat and the weeds. We understand that we are to scatter seeds everywhere, on all types of soil, but we would also like to examine what appears to be growing on these soils and destroy what we would clearly identify to be weeds.*

*The serpent, the devil, was identified as the craftiest of all the wild animals when the Lord God completed his creation. The devil's craftiness is very evident in this parable. Notice that the devil waited until everyone was asleep to do his weed planting. He snuck into the field during the night, planted the weeds, and was gone before anyone woke from their sleep. In the morning, when the slaves saw the weeds, they didn't assume that an enemy had planted the weeds. Instead, they not only questioned the sower of the good seed but accused this sower of planting the weeds also. The enemy was gone from the scene and it seemed logical to blame the lazy gardener who lets the weeds grow.*

*This is a common accusation that many people make against God. Why would a god who is all-powerful and all-mighty allow bad to exist with good? Why would you trust a god who allows bad things to happen to good people? But children of Jesus do not trust in Jesus only when he does things that make sense to them. Children of God's kingdom trust Jesus even when we don't understand or feel we deserve an explanation. When Jesus says, "Let them grow together until harvest", we don't need his approval or an explanation. We simply listen and believe.*

*Jesus does explain that we shouldn't uproot weeds because we would uproot the wheat with the weeds. Shouldn't sorting good and evil be as obvious as pulling a sunflower with a yellow flower out of a soybean field? If we know the difference between a thistle and the grass in your lawn, couldn't we be trusted to help Jesus decide who his children are? What possible benefit can there be in letting them grow together? And if we needed a little training in knowing how to sort good from bad, wouldn't Jesus teach us how to do this? From the very beginning of time when the Lord identified the serpent as crafty, Adam and Eve and you and I have desired to know what God knows...which also includes thinking that we know who belongs to his kingdom.*

*The difference between the children of the kingdom of God and the children of the devil is not determined by appearance. It is not as obvious as a tall weed appearing in your meticulously manicured lawn. When said let the wheat and the weed grow together, he was comparing two plants that appear very much the same.*

*In my previous vocation, I often attended a field school at the University of Minnesota. These schools ended with an extensive practical exam and my least favorite part of it was weed identification. A few of the identifications were made easy, but I usually failed at correctly identifying the grasses. No matter how much*

*time I took in studying the chart and tracing the different identifying features of the plants, I usually messed up on this part of the practical exam.*

*The good news is that Jesus has no trouble in identifying his children. His children may look like the children of the devil. But God's children are those that know when he is speaking, and they listen to him. The crafty devil attempts to sound the same as God. But the devil prefers to plant a seed of doubt in your ear in whose child you are. The children of the kingdom hear a voice that leaves nothing to question. Jesus has spoken to you again today. In your hearing, Jesus has again planted a seed of faith. Faith that is certain. Faith, knowing that you are a child of your heavenly father. Amen*