

Pentecost 8-July 23, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

"Good Seed" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

Last week's gospel about the Parable of the Sower followed by this week's gospel about the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds doesn't help in reminding us how fast the summer is passing us by. It was only last week that Jesus' parable was about the planting of the seeds and now only one week later, Jesus' parable lines up with the season we can see surrounding us. The seeds that were planted only a couple of months ago are getting ripe for harvest. As we drove to Klein Ranch this past week, we saw that the harvest was in full swing. It was not that many years ago, it was a real challenge to keep fields weed free. But now weedy fields are a rare sight, and it is a beautiful scene watching combines harvesting wheat fields that are perfectly free of all weeds.

In last week's sermon about the parable of the sower I said that Jesus didn't use parables for the same reason Aesop used fables. Jesus did not use parables to give you life lessons for you to use like "slow and steady wins the race". Jesus never intended that parables would improve your morality. Jesus taught using parables so that some ears would hear, and others would not.

I recently watched a video about parables led by Dr. Jim Nestigen who was a teacher for many preachers, but also spent many years in many churches as a preacher. Jim was a great teacher who had a wonderful gift of making bible stories come alive by relating them to the rich experiences he remembered in his years as a pastor. Dr. Nestigen died of a heart attack earlier this year, but fortunately for us his unique teaching style continues in many recordings and videos that are at our fingertips. In the video I recently watched, Jim offered one of the best descriptions of what happens in a parable by comparing it to the telling of a joke. You have likely been in a group of people where a joke has been told and some people quickly break out in laughter when the punchline is delivered while others have a confused look on their faces still trying to figure out what is so funny. This is what Jesus meant in the telling of parables. Some people will hear the point and others won't have a clue. Taking this comparison of a joke to a parable a step further, Nestigen adds that the worst kind of joke is one that you must explain to those who don't get it.

This is certainly true of the parable of the wheat and the weeds. If you recall last week, Jesus explained to his disciples many of the key points of the parable of the sower because his disciples didn't get the point. In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, maybe it is because there are more characters in this parable, but Jesus explains this parable even more. Taking a quiz on this parable should give everyone nearly a perfect score. Jesus is very clear in his explanation of this parable that the man who sowed good seed is himself, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom, the field is the world, the enemy is the devil and on and on he explains each character that he uses in this parable. But again, Jesus taught using parables so that some would hear and others would not.

While Jesus may explain nearly every character in this parable, he doesn't explain one character. Jesus doesn't explain to us who the slaves of the household were that came to Jesus to tell them about the weeds that they found growing in his field. There also is no explanation for the odd response of the sower who planted good seed and permitted the weeds to grow along with them.

What kind of a person would come to the sower of the seed who we are told is Jesus, and give him advice about his weedy field? What kind of a person would be so willing to offer their expertise and time and do some weeding for Jesus? Who among us feels they have been given the gift of knowing how to sort the weeds from the wheat or the sheep from the goats or in their mind, clearly knows the difference between good and evil. One person who could be found guilty of this at times is speaking to you today and maybe, just maybe, such a person might be sitting in these pews today or listening to this worship on-line. Jesus began this parable by saying that he taught this parable to teach about the kingdom of heaven. He wasn't teaching this parable about where you work. In your workplace, there needs to be structure. There needs to be order and different levels of supervisors to keep the workplace functioning properly.

But even then, we know how hard it is for this to happen. But when Jesus teaches us about wheat and weeds, he is preparing us so that we won't be surprised when there is opposition to what is good. After the sower planted good seeds, everyone thought nothing could go wrong so they took a nap and when they awakened someone had planted weed seeds among the good seeds. Notice that it wasn't the sower who fell asleep. It was everyone else that fell asleep. The sower is not surprised that the devil showed up. The sower warns us that this will happen. Yes, even in church. In fact, we can safely say especially in church. Wherever good seed is planted, the devil is close at hand ready to plant seeds of doubt here and there with the hopes they would spread. The 23rd Psalm also says not to be surprised about this reality of good mixed with evil where David writes, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies."

The sower knows the weeds don't belong there. Some of the good seeds have noticed that they have been invaded by weeds. But what does this gardener say when others are willing to go to work and pull out the weeds? He says, "Let them grow, for in pulling up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat." Jesus says, even though it is obvious in your mind what should be done, you might cause more problems while attempting to do good. This doesn't mean that Jesus turns his back on evil. It simply means that Jesus will take care of evil. The sorting out of what we think is evil from what we think is good is not a job that has been given to you and me.

I don't think the point in this parable is that we shouldn't pull the weeds from the field because it is hard to distinguish the wheat from the weeds even though the image on the cover of your bulletin for today suggests there is a similarity between wheat seed and the weed called darnel. In fact, it is one of Satan's favorite tactics to confuse evil with what is good. But Jesus doesn't tell his slaves that they might not know which is which. Jesus tells his slaves to leave the weeds for in pulling them out more damage might be done than the good that was intended.

I couldn't help but think about this parable as I watched the variety of kids that attended the Klein Ranch Bible camp this past week. Of course, the youth that came from our parish were all good seeds. Even most of the youth from our Northern Rim Youth Group I could sort into the category of good seed. But then there were those other kids from other churches. Those kids that should have been pulled from the list of kids who had signed up because you could almost tell there might be trouble. And sure enough, there was a little trouble. One of the cabin groups that had been formed was not working very well at first and then as the week went along it got worse. It got to the point that something had to be done or it would destroy the group and the camping experience that the others in the group hoped to have at Klein Ranch. The situation got desperate enough that the cabin counselor asked the longtime camp director, Teri Gayer to step in. I watched and learned as I saw Teri go to work. Teri did not pluck this problem child from the group to eliminate the issue. Instead, Teri called the group together without letting hardly anyone else know what she was doing and taught them what it means to work and live together as God's children even when they don't agree or even act as they should. A greater disruption would have taken place by sending this child home. In making this wise decision, everyone in this cabin group learned from each other and began to work together.

Jesus could have done what seemed practical and logical as suggested by his slaves. Jesus could have turned them loose to destroy the weeds or he could have thanked them for identifying the evil they saw. But instead of applying the logical laws of nature by plucking out the weeds knowing full well that weeds suck the life out of the wheat, Jesus takes care of his garden by providing everything the wheat needs despite being surrounded by weeds.

Thanks be to God that he sent his son Jesus not to condemn us but to save us just as weeds that were left to grow. Jesus has not plucked us from his kingdom by what we have done wrong but left us to live our lives as good seed, because he has removed our sin and replaced it with his goodness by choosing has declared you good seed. Amen