



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**

**July 23, 2017**

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**“A Mixed Field of Wheat and Weeds”**

*(Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“The servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Mt. 13:27-35).*

**Collect:** O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your final judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You in perfect joy hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Your son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

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Whenever brother Paul is at the house, I have to keep half an eye on that guy. He's the one who planted zucchini seeds in my lettuce patch and flower baskets. He's the one who buried bottle caps in my pail of ice cream. He's the one who at Christmas time makes just one strand of my Christmas lights blink. From experience, he should never be sold silly string or fireworks or cayenne pepper or inflatable Santas. And if you're golfing with him and he offers to shoot for you the distance to the pin with one of those lasers, never, ever trust the numbers he gives. He's always looking for opportunity, and no matter how high your vigilance, just know he's good. If he's targeting you, he'll find a way. He's smart and sneaky and determined. So when you discover the evidence of his shenanigans, don't be surprised or alarmed or overly upset. Just roll with the punches . . . and then preach about him in a sermon!

Notice in our text, the reaction of the master of the house. His field has been wrecked by an enemy, who, in the middle of the night, sowed weeds among the wheat. But the master, he's rather calm about the whole business, and patient. He's not overly upset, is he? He's not cursing or shouting or stomping around angrily. And he doesn't seem surprised, either. He just knows this is the way of the world. There's a dark force always working against him. And he knows because of this Evil One, there will be trouble and hardship and opposition and grief.

My grandmother had an expression: "It's part of the cost of living." What she meant is we live in a fallen world right, a world spoiled by sin, death and the devil. And so there is a "cost of living", no matter our age or socio economic status, we can anticipate pain and injustice, opposition, and attacks. So there's no reason to become

overly upset or surprised or angered by any of it.

Our text is a straightforward account of agricultural sabotage. This man has a field of wheat, but an enemy has sown weeds in his wheat field. More specifically the weeds are darnel. It's related to rye grass which, especially in the early stages of growth, looks very much like wheat. You can't really tell the difference until later in the growth cycle, and by then it's too late. The roots of the darnel and wheat are intertwined. So to go through the field pulling weeds would mean trampling on the wheat and uprooting some of the wheat as well.

But it gets worse: the grains of darnel are poisonous. To have darnel mixed in with wheat renders the crop commercially useless as well as potentially harmful. Feuding farmers did this sort of thing to one another, and they did it often enough that the Romans even wrote laws specifically dealing with the crime of sowing weeds in your neighbor's field.

In any event, the only solution is to wait until the harvest, and then do the painstaking work of cutting all the stalks and separating them, the weeds from the wheat. Then the weeds were burned as rubbish or as a quick fire for the ovens.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like that. That is, there is a dark menace at work in the world, a mysterious power. This menace opposes everything that is good and right in the world, and tries to sow death and disorder, division and chaos. And this Evil One is forever at it. There are no fields or gardens in this world where only grain grows; the weeds are always there. That is, in all areas of life, and in every field of study, with every desire we have, God's enemy and yours will be trying to spoil that which is inherently good.

Some examples: Consider chemistry. It serves us and improves our lives in countless ways, for example eradicating pests that would spoil our food sources. But chemistry can be used to eradicate whole villages in Syria. Who's mixed up in that kind of science? Not just evil men;

there are darker forces at work.

God gives us medicines for healing and relief; the devil gives us heroin and fentanyl and the slow form of suicide they often prove to be.

God gives us music that can lift our spirits and our praise; the evil one gives us music that glorifies rape and violence and death.

God gives us humor that can bring joy to our lives, our marriages, our families. But the devil prefers humor that tears down and mocks and humiliates.

Wherever there is a good field, you can be sure the devil is out there sowing his toxic seed. Every pleasure in its purest form is a gift from God. But the devil tries to sow his weeds there too. So the natural pleasure of a glass of wine is of God; there's nothing inherently evil about wine. But it's not God's will that we become intoxicated, nor would any man in his right mind want to become an alcoholic. No, there's a darker force at work.

Sex is a good gift of God for marriages. But the devil works evil and chaos there too, turning it into a disordered desire, something that happens outside the marriage covenant. St. Augustine taught that fire is good, a gift from God when it's controlled . . . in the fire place. But it's not good when it's running up the curtains. It has become "disordered."

Of course, the devil is at work among God's people as well. There are weeds among the wheat. Judas is in the midst of the apostles. Heretics are mixed in among the orthodox, the wicked mixed in with the good, the unbelievers with the saints.

What to do? We can understand the angry reaction of the servants. They want to go in and start pulling weeds, but the master will have none of it. "Hands off" he says. "Let them both grow until the harvest." He doesn't want there to be any collateral damage.

Remember how for the sake of just a few righteous ones, God refused to bring down his wrath on the rebellious city of Sodom? And remember how Jonah wanted God to

wipe out the city of Nineveh. God would have none of it. He was more interested in their salvation than he was in their destruction. And remember how that Samaritan village rejected Jesus and his disciples (Lk. 9:52ff)? James and John asked, “Lord do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?” Maybe they thought Jesus would chuckle at their zealous bravado. In either case, he wasn’t amused. He turned and rebuked them. He didn’t come to condemn the world but to save the world (Jn. 3:17).

We also want to be very careful lest in fighting the dragon we become the dragon. That is, sometimes we can become so serious, so dour and disapproving, so grim and judgmental that our witness to Jesus is effectively undermined. Instead of winning people over, we repel them. Instead of sending up a pleasing fragrance to the Lord, we become odious, smelling of herbicide. Mark Twain speaks somewhere of “a good Christian in the worst sense”, and I think we know what he meant. Our lives in Christ should be marked by joy rather than judgmentalism, by love rather than condemnation. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples” said Jesus, “if you love one another” (Jn. 13:35).

In his book “The Name of the Rose” Umberto Eco talks about the inquisition, Catholicism’s attempt over the centuries to pull the weeds from the wheat field, to combat heresy in the church. And Eco noticed that in many cases, the inquisition created more heretics than it eliminated. First, it imagined heretics where there were none. Second, their methods were so cruel and rough that good hearted people started siding with heretics, out of hatred for the inquisitors. Again, who’s mixed up in that?

There is also another way in which we can look at this parable. If your life was a field of wheat, what would it look like? Nice and clean, with a full harvest? Or, are there some weeds growing among the wheat. Is there sin growing tall and green among the amber waves of grain? Are there disordered desires mixed in?

The truth is, your life like mine is a mixture of weeds and wheat. As Martin Luther put it, we are simul justus et

peccator. You are, I am simultaneously saint and sinner. As God's people we are never one without the other.

Acknowledging both the wheat and the weeds in us keeps us from thinking too highly of ourselves. After all, look how tall and proud those weeds are growing in your field! But it also keeps us from thinking too lowly of ourselves, as useless to the Lord, or as a lost cause. No, there's wheat in that field of yours. God knows it. He can see it, even when we cannot. And look how patient he is! He doesn't plow the field under, or lay waste to it with one well placed match on a windy day! At the harvest, he'll do the painstaking work of separating out the weeds from the wheat in the world, the unbelievers from the believers. The one will be saved by grace through faith, unbelievers will not according to his justice. (That's the reality.) But on the last day he'll also separate the weeds from the wheat in your life. And he'll only judge you on the basis of the wheat. His mercy will take care of the weeds. He gathers those weeds together and burns them up with the fire of his love and forgiveness. At the same time he bundles up the wheat with grace and generosity and goodness, and accepts it, receives it, gives you credit for it, and even says to us, "Well done!" Nothing but grace and forgiveness can account for that!

We are, each of us, a mixture of weeds and wheat, saints and sinners simultaneously. We ought not think too highly of ourselves or others, nor dismiss ourselves or others as useless to the Lord, or hopeless. There's room for grace and patience. We trust him to gather us in at the close of the age, and to judge rightly, justly, and graciously as he promised. At that time, he will separate the weeds from the wheat, and deal with those weeds according to his justice, and with the wheat according to his mercy. Thanks be to God! Amen.



