

**Our Savior Lutheran Church  
Sermon – Tim Leitner, SAM  
July 19, 2020  
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**

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

My sermon preparation has never been easy but it's been more of a struggle to ponder and develop messages since this pandemic has entered our lives. I find this change troubling but it helped to read last week's sermon by Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber. I am borrowing her closing prayer from that message, using it for an opening:

***Loving God, if comparison is the thief of joy, then Lord, help me to not compare my life today to my life 6 months ago. Help me find the joy in THIS life, and in THIS day and to know that it is from You, and it is enough. Amen.***

Part of my struggle with my sermon prep is that I read through my older messages for guidance and to see what I had focused on but those old messages speak to a different time than what we experience today. In my struggles though, I find that there are new thoughts to share, new meaning to be found in God's Word and it is only by God's help that I have these words to speak today.

Normally I add verses to an assigned reading in order to set context, to have a clearer picture of what scripture is teaching us. But I find with today's Gospel reading, I wanted to shorten it. The lectionary assigned this parable of the weeds and the wheat, which only appears in Matthew's Gospel, combined with its interpretation, skipping over verses in between.

While studying this text, I found scholarly support that suggests this parable and its interpretation should be separately discussed, stating the parable was most likely Jesus' words but the interpretation was probably added by Matthew, meant for the early church of his time, and the troubles that they were having.

I found quite a number of writings on what this interpretation of the parable "really" meant. One suggested that the weeds are Christian heretics and the parable is saying that these heretics should not be killed, contrary to what other Christians would have liked. Rather the heretics should be left for God will deal with on judgment day. Another writer thought that it meant that the early Christian community, being the wheat, should not uproot itself from the land of Israel where they lived among non-believers, the weeds. A third, interpreted as there will be evil people who are part of the Christian community but we should live with them, not forcing them out, leave it to God to decide their fate.

Rather than side with any of those writings, I took the route to focus strictly on the parable, leaving the interpretation for another time. In this parable a landowner sows wheat in the field but weeds are sown among the wheat while everyone slept. The servants spot the weeds and after questioning the quality of seeds that were sown, they suggest they go out and pull these weeds out of the fields.

A quick note on translation. The Greek word used for weed is *zizanon* and it probably refers to the plant, “darnel”, which resembles wheat until they both mature. These young weeds are difficult to visually identify among the young wheat plants. The landowner in the parable tells the servants, rather than causing damage to the wheat in attempting to remove the weeds, leave it for the reapers who can identify the difference at harvest time.

Considering Jesus’ intended meaning to His listeners, we may think, **What! Jesus doesn’t trust us to do the weeding for Him?** If Jesus had been truly talking about gardening, I would be relieved since I’m not a fan of weeding. But this parable is about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is telling us, it is not our mission to remove all the evil from the world. We would never accomplish such a task, no matter how hard we try. More importantly, in our zealotry to rid our lives of all evil, we would uproot and destroy so much good along with the way. Too often we believe that we have the only way of being the good ‘wheat’ and all others are evil/weed. There lies the danger.

Is our assumption that we all are wheat? That question kept me from tying in the interpretation of this parable. The interpretation reads like the world is neatly divided in good or evil. We are either wheat, as the children of God or weeds as the children of evil. But our world is not that cut and dry, no matter how divided we have become in these current times. We are neither all wheat or all weed. That is grounded in our Lutheran theology, we are all both weed and wheat, sinner and saint. We may be different mixtures but none of us are perfect followers.

We hear Jesus say in this parable; don’t go weeding the field of wheat because He knows our tendency to compare our behaviors with others. Too often we compare our best with another person’s worst. We think by acting good enough or acting better than the next person, we will keep ourselves from being pulled up with the weeds and bundled for the fire at our hour of judgment.

Jesus’ direction to us is not to sit back and piously wait for the coming of God’s kingdom. He still gives us work to do. This parable today is only a portion of His guidance to us. The core of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew comes in chapter 22, in responding to a lawyer’s question of what is the greatest commandment. Jesus response is our primary direction in life. It is the core of who we are to be and how we are to Follow Him: ***‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your***

***heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.***

That is the important work that God has given us. We are not given the work of weeding out all evil. We are not to pretend that we are perfect wheat. We are to live out those two commandments, continually turning to God for strength to love as He commands. God loves us always. In our time of wheat when we are following His commandments and He loves us and forgives us for our time of sin, when we are ‘in the weeds’. We are all His creation. Jesus lived out these commandments as an example for how we are to live.

Our Lord, Jesus the Christ, taught and loved those who were seen as unlovable, the poor, the suffering, the outcasts, the sinners, those easy seen as weeds. Jesus gave His life on the cross for us all, bringing forgiveness for us all even those who arrested, betrayed, beat and mocked Him and even for those who nailed Him to the cross to die. In His sacrifice Jesus brought forgiveness for all of our sins. Jesus did that all out of love for us.

We live with the promise that we are forgiven for our ‘weediness’, in order to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. That is the hope that we can cling to, the Promise of God’s forgiveness given through His Son, Jesus. We are so incredibly thankful for our God that showed us His grace through His loving Son Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins, to take us beyond our inability to be perfect wheat. God welcomes us into eternal life with Him. A Promise that no one can take away. No one can diminish.

This parable from Jesus is not a call to be passive in the face of evil. We are not to ignore the injustices in the world, cruelty in the world. Instead it is a reminder that **we** do not have the ability to solve it all. We cannot eradicate all the bad that happens in the world, in our life. But the Promise is even though this world is not in our control, God is the final judge and He will do the weeding. Evil in the world is temporary, unlike our eternal life brought to us by God. Fixing all the bad in the world was never our job, rather we are to live obediently and faithfully as we can, trusting in the final harvest by God. We are to continue our work of loving and caring for each other, following His commandments: **Loving God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind. And loving all others as we love our self.**

**Let us pray: Gracious and Loving God, we ask that you enable us to love when we find ourselves thick in the weeds. Strengthen us in times that we falter, unable to live as your Son Jesus taught us. Help us love all others here in this world, and forgive us when we fail. And**

**thank You for Your Love shown through your Son, Jesus the Christ. For this we are eternally grateful. Amen.**