

*Seventh Sunday after Pentecost*

July 23, 2017

Sermon by Pastor Sam Wolff

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew. (Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43)

[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

The Gospel of the Lord.

If you have a picnic planned for this afternoon, or you have a tee-time on the golf course, then you’re probably going to make it on time, because this morning the sermon is going to be quite short.

There is a lot in this parable, there really is. But as I was preparing it, one thing just kept jumping out at me, and I just can’t let it go. And that’s when Jesus basically says, “Just leave the weeds alone.”

Cindy and I last spring, my wife Cindy and I, were out walking, and we came to this beautiful field that was full of dandelions. And somebody was out there spraying to kill them. And I mentioned to Cindy, I said, “I wonder who got to choose that dandelions were weeds?” I wish it would have been my turn to choose, because I would have said, “No, they’re beautiful flowers.” You know, as a child I loved to blow the fluffy stuff off. And as an adult I still look at a dandelion and I think, “Oh, that’s really pretty.” But who got to choose that? Who said that in the beginning?

The parables of Jesus are always multilayered with different things that come out, and they can have different meanings to different kinds and to different people. The parables of Jesus are living. And so this parable, too, has a lot going into it. But, as I said before, the one thing that just keeps jumping out is, “Just leave the weeds alone.”

We, as Christians, I think, have done a pretty good job of pulling out weeds. We know for sure, we know for sure when we are right and someone else is wrong. We, for many years, have said, “We hold the truth, the only truth, and all of those people over there, they are weeds. They don’t know it.” We don’t do this by ourselves. Muslims do the same thing. Hindus do the same thing. People not with faith do the same thing. We as people just love to look at others, see that weed, and pull them out.

And when we do this, well, what happens? Really nothing good. Wars can be brought about by people or nations trying to weed out the weeds. Death, racism, sexism, hate, separation, we create a “we-versus-they-world,” and never an “us-world.” And we come armed with something that’s a lot sharper than a hoe or scythe. We come to weed out weeds with the Word of God. We look at a certain passage, and we look at that to prove someone else is wrong, never bothering to read it in the context. We use the Bible, and we have used the Bible, to beat people up. Certainly, this is not the purpose of the Word of God. And when we do this, we forget that those weeds out there were also planted by the same God whom we worship.

How do we hear this parable this morning? I would guess that most of us, when we hear the parable, we think, “Well, you know, we aren’t the weeds.” I know that’s the way I feel when I read the parable. At least I’m not one of the weeds.

But I wonder how God sees it. I wonder how our Lord, looking into our hearts, I wonder what God sees? Does he see good grain, or does he see my life also full of weeds?

In Matthew’s account of the Last Supper, Jesus stands up at one point and he says, “One of you will betray me.” And then there is a very simple exchange between Jesus and the disciples, one that we usually kind of skip over and move straight on to Herod and Pilot and everything that was happening this night, and we kind of go over the words. When Jesus says, “One of you will betray me,” every disciple, in his turn, stands up and says, “Is it I, Lord? Is it I?” I think in these words of truth, the Gospel realized that there are some weeds in all of us.

What would we do this morning if Jesus came walking down the aisle, and he got up and he took the mike, and he said, “You know, this morning one of you is going to betray me,” what would you do? I know what I would do. I would start looking around to see which one of you it is. And I might even give Jesus a couple of, you know, a couple names. You know, maybe those people sitting over there, or these people. You know, I’ve been here two months; they’ve been to church once. Look at them, dear Jesus. But I do know for sure, I would not look at myself and say, “Is it I, Lord?”

Soon we are going to sing one of my very favorite hymn songs, "*It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*" I love this; I love the music. But I also like the theology behind it, because it forces me, when I take these words to heart, to look at myself and to quit judging other people. Because it is not you, it's not my brother; it's not my sister. It's me, O Lord, that stands in need of prayer.

I have to look at myself for judging others. It's not the deacon, it's not the preacher, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer. I need to leave the weeds alone. Let God sort that out. I don't know who is a weed and who is not. But what I do know is I am a person who stands in the need of prayer.

And so this morning I say, "Thank you, dear Jesus, for taking my sins upon your back. Thank you for salvation that comes through you. Thank you for forgiving me, as I am standing in the need of prayer."

Amen.