

Sermon for August 13, 2017 – Pentecost 10*

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: What Should We Do About the Weeds?

- 1) Recognize their source.
- 2) Accept their presence.
- 3) Be sure of their destiny.

²⁴He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶When the plants sprouted and produced heads of grain, the weeds also appeared. ²⁷The servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸He said to them, ‘An enemy did this.’ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?’ ²⁹‘No,’ he answered, ‘because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn.”’” ³⁶Then Jesus sent the people away and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” ³⁷He answered them, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the Evil One. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

I don't know if you have noticed, but our world is very hostile to Christianity. In places like North Korea and areas controlled by radical Islam, Christians are routinely arrested and even killed. Persecution in our own country, however, is more subtle. Biblical beliefs are mocked in the media and we are called intolerant for saying sin is sin. Scholars who believe in things like the biblical account of creation feel the pressure in Academia – as they are often marginalized by their unbelieving peers. Yes, when you look behind the façade of civility, it doesn't take too long to realize that the people of this world really dislike Biblical Christianity.

So, what should Christians do in response? Should we establish some sort Christian state that would be freed from the influences of this world? Should we take a page from radical Islam's play book and try to rid the world of infidels? Absolutely not!

Then what should we do? With Jesus' parable of the weeds as our guide, let us listen to our Savior's answer to this question, under the theme: **What should we do with the weeds?** 1) *Recognize their source.* 2) *Accept their presence.* 3) *Be sure of their destiny.*

Part One: Recognize their source

Jesus once said: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.*

As Jesus explains, the field is the world and the man who sowed the good seed is the “Son of Man”; that is Jesus himself. The good seed are the sons of Christ’s Kingdom: believers like you and me scattered throughout the world, in whom the Holy Spirit has graciously wakened faith through the preaching of the soul-saving Gospel of Christ. And faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins isn’t without effect. No, it produces fruit: giving birth to a new spirit inside of us that loves God and wants to share his Gospel with others so that they too might be saved.

Unfortunately, God’s enemy, the devil, wants to ruin God’s world. During the night, he scattered weeds on the field. Now the weeds the devil scattered are more serious than your average crab grass or dandelions. The Greek word translated as “weed” seems to indicate a specific type of darnel that grows up looking exactly like rye until the kernels start to appear. To make matters worse, this type of darnel can contain a poisonous mold that can make animals and humans deathly sick.

Jesus explains that these potentially deadly weeds, are the sons of the evil one; that is to say that they represent all who refuse to believe in Christ and thereby attempt to suppress the spread of the Gospel. And just as both rye grass and bearded darnel look almost identical as they sprout, so also believers and unbelievers cannot be told apart simply by looking at them. They work at the same jobs, enjoy the same hobbies, root for the same teams, work hard for their communities, and love their country. In all outward appearances, they may look the same, and yet they are entirely different.

Take, for example the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They appeared to be the very picture of righteousness and morality. But, knowing what lurked in their hearts, Jesus said of them: *You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire (John 8:44 NIV84).* And what was the desire that both the devil and the Pharisees wanted to carry out? The same thing the unbelieving world want to accomplish today: preventing people from receiving salvation through faith in Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: all of us who look to Jesus in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins are the wheat God has planted in this community for the spread of his Gospel and to the glory of his name. Sadly, the devil has also planted weeds in our community that try to prevent us from growing in our faith and sharing God’s message of salvation.

Part Two: Accept their presence

“But,” someone might ask, “if God wants his Gospel to spread, why doesn’t he just get rid of those who try to suppress it?” The servants in Jesus’ parable wondered the same thing. We read: *²⁷The servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where*

did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸*He said to them, ‘An enemy did this.’ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather up the weeds?’*

The servants reasoned that wheat could grow a lot easier and healthier if the weeds weren’t around stealing their nourishment and hindering their growth. But look at how emphatically the master answers them: ²⁹*‘No,’ he answered, ‘because when you gather up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “First, gather up the weeds, bind them in bundles, and burn them. Then, gather the wheat into my barn.”’*

The LORD cares for each and every one of his elect on this earth. He does not want a single one of them to be mistakenly destroyed with the wicked – something that could easily happen if they are taken before their time. This is why the master tells his servants to wait until the harvest, when each person - just like the plants in the parable - will reveal who they truly are. Who knows? Some people you might have thought were “weeds” will probably turn out to be “wheat” – and some people you considered to be wheat may reveal themselves as hypocritical weeds.

Yes, when it comes to dealing with unbelievers on this earth, God does not want Christians to go on crusades to try to rid the earth of infidels. This is what the devil tries to get his followers to do to believers! No, when it comes to dealing with unbelievers, God wants us to remember Jesus’ words and tolerate their presence in the world with us. Do not try to hurt, harm or remove unbelievers from the world, rather reach out to them in all sincerity and love – praying for their conversion. Why? Because even Christianity’s worst enemies can end up becoming God’s most fruitful servants. Consider the apostle Paul who, before his conversion, was the worst kind of weed only later to be revealed as the one of the most fruitful stalks of wheat this world has ever known.

Yes, when it comes to life on this earth, God wants us to accept the fact we will have to share this world with the wicked and to prayerfully tolerate those who, by their words and actions persecute us. Instead of responding with hate, God wants us to live in hope - lovingly calling all to repentance and faith whenever the opportunity arises. God wants us to do this because he himself is patient – not wanting any to be lost. *As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.* (Ezekiel 33:11 NIV84)

Part Three: Be sure of their destiny.

Sadly, however, many enemies of the Gospel will not turn to Christ in repentance and live. They will continue in their unbelief all the way up until their deaths. What will happen to such people? Will they also go to heaven, even though they refused to accept Jesus as their God and LORD?

Jesus is crystal clear about the fate of those who refused to believe in him: ⁴⁰*Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will pull out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and those*

who continue to break the law. ⁴²The angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As I mentioned before, even though darnels may look harmless, they can easily host a dangerous and deadly mold. Because this is the case, they need to be separated from the wheat at the harvest and destroyed. Such is also the fate of those who refuse to believe in Jesus. They need to be cast into fire for the sake of the believers, so that sin and evil maybe thoroughly eradicated and never corrupt God's people again.

This is certainly a severe warning and helps us understand why God wants us to be patient as we live our lives on this earth. He doesn't want a single one of his elect people to be lost. This is why he urges us to do all we can to share God's message of salvation with those who don't know Christ – so that, hearing the Gospel, they too might repent and believe.

But Jesus not only offers words of condemnation when he talks about the final harvest, he also gives believers this comfort and hope: when he separates the weeds from the wheat during the final harvest, he will take all who believe in him to his heavenly home, to live as his dearly loved children forever. *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.* There will be nothing evil and painful that will ever hurt us again.

Jesus concludes his explanation of the parable with these words: *Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.* Jesus wants all people to take this warning and comfort very seriously. His patient tolerance of all the evil done on this earth does not mean that He won't do what he says. His patience does have a limit. He will keep his promise to judge the world – casting into hell those who, after being warned repeatedly, refused to repent and believe. He will also keep his promise to deliver all his sons and daughters through faith in Christ – bringing them home to heaven, to live with him in everlasting, righteousness, innocence and blessedness. May this hope help us tolerate the evil done to us today, moving us to boldly proclaim Christ to the world and to keep our hearts prepared for His imminent return. Amen.