

**The 7th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**July 19, 2020**  
**PROPER 11**

**The Lessons:** Isaiah 44:6-8  
 Psalm 119:57-64  
 Romans 8:18-27  
 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

**The Hymns:** # 772 "In Holy Conversation"  
 # 892 "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"  
 # 921 "On What Has Now Been Sown"

**The 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.**

The Sermon: "Wheat and Weeds"  
 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field....

Dear Friends in Christ,

And so, the Church is spread. Last week and again today we hear parables of our Lord. He describes a man who sows seed in His field. In fact, Jesus is describing his own activity. He has come into His world to spread His Word of grace in order to raise up His holy people. He enlists, trains and then sends forth His apostles with the great commission to "make disciples of all nations" by baptizing and teaching them to observe all his commands. Some 25 years later St. Matthew writes down his account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus so that Jews living in the Greek-speaking Roman Empire would believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah that God had promised to the Jews and by His suffering, death and resurrection has become the Savior of the world.

St. John tells us in his gospel that not everything Jesus said and did were written down by the four Evangelists. Some things were omitted while others were chosen. One might wonder why these parables of Jesus about the sowing of the seed and the wheat and the tares were included. Let me tell you why I think they were included.

During those 25 or so years between Jesus' giving of the Great Commission and the writing of Matthew's gospel, the Apostles had been very busy spreading the good news. On the day of Pentecost there was a great and powerful outpouring of the Spirit upon these disciples of our Lord, and from then on, their one goal was to spread the Gospel and establish community of believers throughout the world. When they were scattered by persecution, they took the message to more and

more distant places -- from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and beyond. And wherever they went, they found people responding to their message of Salvation. The conversion of Saul was a pivotal turning point, for he who had once persecuted Jesus' Church now, as the Apostle Paul, began to travel abroad spreading the very gospel he had once opposed. People were converted, congregations were established, the seed of God's word was growing and taking root.

But as time went on, the Apostles began to notice some interesting things about their work. Sometimes their message was rejected completely. Sometimes it was received with joy and excitement at first, but then the excitement faded and the new believers quickly vanished. Still others began to believe, but the threat of persecution or the worldly attractions of the flesh or the love of riches pulled them away. And in other cases, of course, faithful believers stood firm and responded to the love of their Savior by spreading acts of love to others.

As Matthew and the other Apostles noticed these things happening, they would, of course, remember some of the parables of Jesus -- particularly how Jesus had pointed out in the parable of the sower, how different people would respond to the hearing of the word. So I think Matthew included last week's parable of the sower in his Gospel to explain why people fall away and to warn the Christian community and especially new believers, that there are dangers (the birds, the rocks, the thorns) that will threaten their faith when they are not grounded deeply in the Word of God. St. John does something very similar when he includes in his gospel, the description of Jesus as the Vine and we as the branches and how we have to remain connected to the Vine if we are to produce the good fruit that God requires.

In the parable that Jesus tells in our Gospel lesson today we see another problem addressed by our Lord: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away..."

The enemy crept in and sowed weeds among the wheat. Not just any weeds: these were a kind that looked just like the wheat as they sprouted and grew. It was only until much later on that these weeds would change enough so that it became obvious that they were not the good grain. It was a clever enemy indeed.

The devil is a clever enemy, and we dare not dismiss his cunning. Throughout history, he has used persecution and violence against the Lord's Church in order to destroy it, but this has never accomplished his goal; indeed, a famous saying is that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," because the witness of persecuted Christians has usually strengthened the resolve of other believers and, in fact, won over many converts. But this does not deter the evil one; instead, he resorts to a far more insidious plan.

He creates a false church and intermingles it with Jesus' true Church. He raises up unbelievers who claim to be Christian, but do not follow the Lord and His Word. This has a few effects: for one thing, many will join a false church and then believe that they are truly Christians because they do what that church teaches, even though it rejects many of the clear teachings of Scripture. For another, it casts Jesus and His people into disrepute. Unbelievers see a group committing sins in the name of Jesus, and conclude that all Christians are so hypocritical—perhaps in need of control and legislation, even prosecution.

Don't forget, of course, that your Old Adam is at work within you daily. By the seduction of the world's temptations, or by the despair of witnessing the evil in this world, your sinful nature seeks to reduce you from living wheat to dying weed. The devil is skilled with his planting, and the tares look just like the wheat for a long time. In the parable, it's not until the crop is produced that the workers see the difference:

"So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And 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 barns.'"

There's one more bit of discouraging news we see here: the weeds are going to be around until the harvest. False believers, claiming the name and blessing of Jesus, are going to be around until the Last Day. To the eyes of many, they will look like a good, helpful, productive crop. It's not going to be different or better before then. In fact, from Matthew 24 and elsewhere, it is clear that the weeds will nearly choke out the wheat. Jesus himself prophesied that true Christianity will be nearly snuffed out before the Lord returns in glory. It is not pleasant news, but it is good to be prepared. There are many who believe that the Church will only grow greater and more glorious on earth as it triumphantly prepares the way for Jesus, but this is not what the Scriptures say. Those who believe it to be so are priming themselves to be bitterly disappointed and perhaps led astray.

That's enough of the discouraging news. Here's the encouragement: the Lord's harvest will remain, and the harvest day will come. While the Church will be buffeted and battered, the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and the Lord will return on the Last Day to deliver His people to heaven. It is then, when the harvest is gathered, that weeds and wheat will be seen by all for what they really are. Those hypocrites who gloried in sin and claimed Jesus' name will be bundled up and burned. But those who remained faithful to their Lord and His Word will rejoice and be delivered into the heavenly granary. Do not despair, dear Christians made righteous through Jesus' blood: the harvest is coming. And on the Day of Resurrection, you will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father.

Until then, you are the Lord's, and He will preserve you. He has already given His body and shed His blood on the cross to make you His by forgiving your sins and clothing you in righteousness. He will not forsake you now, not ever.

The lesson of the wheat and the tares is taught again in the book of Revelation, though with different imagery. The false church is pictured as a popular woman (Rev. 17), dressed in scarlet with all sort of wealth and worldly friends. She is called "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots," for she has played the harlot by being unfaithful to God and adopting the world's teachings in order to be praised. On the Last Day, she is destroyed. The true Church is portrayed as a woman who is chased out into the wilderness as the devil seeks to kill her (Rev. 12). She remains in that desolate place and suffers persecution from the evil one, but she is not destroyed: she has a place prepared there for her by God. There, He feeds her and nourishes her. There, He keeps her until He returns to take her as His

bride to the wedding feast of heaven. In the end, the scarlet woman ends in ashes, while the poor woman in the wilderness is clothed in radiant white to share in the marriage feast of heaven forever.

In this wilderness of the world, the Lord has prepared a place for you. He has made you His own, gave you a new birth, by the waters of Holy Baptism. Already this hour, He has nourished you with His Word. In today's Old Testament lesson, He said to you, "Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed, there is no other Rock; I know not one." " Do not fear: the weeds are troubling, but the one true God is your Rock. He is not going anywhere, the weeds can't lay a finger on Him, and He will keep and deliver you for the sake of Jesus.

Furthermore, in today's epistle (Ro. 8:26-27), you heard the wonderful news that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for you. Sometimes in this world, you might be so battered and beaten that prayer is difficult and words so hard to find. Even then, your Savior prays for you, interceding before His Father in heaven; and, for Jesus' sake, God the Father will work all things to your good. He will deliver you to His kingdom forever.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.