

July 23, 2017

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Pulling Weeds”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

It’s hard not to pull weeds. Just outside my office in front of the church there is that red landscape mulch or whatever you call it and underneath it is a weed barrier cloth. But still, some weeds grow. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been coming or going and I just have to stop and pull up those little buggers. It just rubs me wrong that those dastardly little weeds are messing up the nice, even red bed of woodchips. So even though it means dirt under my fingernails and red dye stained hands, I start pickin’ and pickin’.

The same can be said for life, right? I mean, we’ve got this life in our mind’s eye where everything more or less works out nice. There’s peace. There’s happiness. It’s generally free of hassles and hardships. But real life doesn’t look that way, does it? So what do we do? We start pulling weeds. We work to clear the weeds of hardship, conflict and downright evil from our lives aspiring to that clear bed of the good life.

And quite frankly, this is good practice. It’s normal and this is the kind of life we hope and pray in many of our good, old Lutheran prayers—a quiet, peaceable life. The thing is though, Jesus’ parable here tells us that’s never really going to happen. The field is the world, and it’s not a place clear of weeds.

This is preacher’s dream parable because I could go off in many directions here ranging from the temptation of the evil of sin that’s all around us in the world to how we as the church are to stand out as followers of Christ apart from the multitude of unbelievers in the world to even talking evangelism and how we need to get out there and share the Word and turn some of the weeds into wheat. But that’s not really where Jesus places His focus when His disciples privately ask Him to explain it. He gives a very complete and succinct run down of the parable’s imagery: *“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons 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.”*

But Jesus moves right past the field, the sowing, and the growing and zeroes in on the harvest, the end of the age, the Last Day. *“Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”*

This really is just Jesus explaining to His followers how things stand with the kingdom of God. Yes, the parable reveals that things aren’t how they should be in the world. The enemy Satan has made a royal mess of things so that sin has spoiled things and weeds are all over the place. But the point, the warning if you will, is that at the harvest there are only two outcomes: the good seed that are the children of the kingdom are glorified. The bad seed that are the sons of evil one is burned. And I don’t think anyone can hear this parable without having the thought pass through their mind about which seed we are.

So what do we do with this parable? I think we should pull weeds.

I’m not talking about the weeds in the parable. The weeds in the parable are only detectable when they fail to bear grain. The weeds in the parable are unbelievers, and maybe by extension, the opposition of the world to Christ. I think we are all too willing to go through the

motions of pulling these weeds. We condemn the evils of the world we see on TV and computer screens and we'll shake our heads and grumble at the offenses of others in our communities, families and even churches. But what good does that really do? Is that bearing grain, bearing fruit for God?

No. I think the grain, the fruit, is faith in the Son of Man. This is the fruit of those who have the ears to hear and heed these parables. And you don't do that by looking at the world, passing judgment on who the weeds are, focusing on kicking all those bad weeds out of your little chunk of the field so you can stand alone as God's holy plant.

No, the parable makes us ask, "Am I a seed of the kingdom or not?" So, the weeds we need to pull aren't the ones around us. They're the ones inside us. They are anything of us that may impede or choke our faith in Christ.

Greed, lust, covetousness, self-righteousness, anger, being quarrelsome, being easily offended, playing the victim, self-importance, pride and conceit, jealousy, gossip, hatred, unforgiveness: these are the practices that kill faith. Loving and fearing the world more than Almighty God is idolatry and poison to faith. These are the weeds within ourselves we must recognize for the evil that they are and have pulled.

How do we do that? Actually, we don't. We can't. That's where our Spirit-given faith comes in. In faith we turn to Jesus and say, "I have all these weeds. I am a weed. Please, Lord, I don't want to be a weed."

And Jesus says, "You're not. My Gospel Word declares you good seed. I baptized you to good seed. I feed you my own holy body and blood that died and rose to make you good seed." We walk away faithfully believing our Savior and behold, we're bearing that grain of faith! We simply cannot be the weed!

And having such assurance you can have peace, because your faith is not aimed at the fallen weed-filled world around you. Your faith is aimed at your Savior: what He has done by His cross and empty tomb, the forgiveness life and salvation He is doing to you daily in His Word and Sacrament, and the promise He will accomplish when He sends His angels for the harvest and His righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Knowing that by Christ you are good seed, the world will be bad and nasty and evil as it can to you, but in faith you endure knowing "*the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*"

So make a practice of pulling weeds. Not the world's weeds. Not the weeds that are the challenges of this life. Not the weeds that are unbelievers, or maybe just fellow believers not behaving so well. No, make a practice of seeking and identifying the weeds in and of yourself trying to grow between you and your Savior. Then bring them to Him, as many times as it takes, and ask Him to remove them that you would remain His good seed.

This is a scary parable. The weeds are burned in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Make sure you're not a weed. Run to Jesus in faith and you are the good seed, only because He died and rose to make you so.

Amen.