

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Growing up in Central Illinois, we didn't grow wheat. It was corn and soybeans mostly. The corn would grow fast and tall, and corn tolerated more chemicals; so weeds weren't really much of a problem in cornfields. Back then, we would field cultivate the corn, using the shovels on the cultivator to uproot the weeds around the corn. They don't do that any more. By the way, that's the reason why my uncle didn't let his junior high nephews do the planting. He wanted straight rows, which we, just looking over the front of the tractor, hadn't mastered; he wanted straight rows so that when we would take the cultivator out, we wouldn't uproot the corn in those crooked rows.

Soybeans were a different story. Weeds grew faster and taller than the beans, and dirty fields not only looked bad, but those weeds really robbed the beans of water and sun. Yield would be reduced significantly if you didn't do something. You can see why farmers generally like clean fields. Even more, farmers get docked at the grain elevators if there are too many foreign seeds in their harvest.

Now, remember, it's been a long time since I was on the farm, but back then, one of the things young people did for summer work was to walk beans. We would get out into the field about sunrise and we would walk through the bean rows, pulling or cutting out the weeds: milkweed, cocklebur, jimson weed, lambsquarters, etc. Most of that practice is obsolete. Today, most farmers use genetically modified beans that tolerate the weed killers they spray on their fields, and so, today fields look beautiful with hardly a weed in sight anywhere.

Jesus tells another parable in our Gospel today, not talking about corn and soybeans, but setting it in a field with wheat and weeds. He tells of a man sowing good seed, and of an enemy sowing weeds. He tells of servants who recognized the weeds and who inquired about pulling them out. But unlike when I was young, walking beans, "No," they were told. "You might root up the wheat. Leave them until the harvest. Then gather up the weeds in bundles and burn them. And gather the wheat into my harvest barns." The surface meaning of this parable is not so hard to understand, but what of the deeper meaning? After all, Jesus is not just giving advice to farmers.

Leaving the crowds, Jesus explains His parable to the disciples. He begins by identifying the main characters: the man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man; that's Jesus, of course. The enemy is the devil. The field is the world. The good seed is the sons of the kingdom, whereas the weeds are the sons of the evil one. The harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are the angels.

Recalling that Jesus is really just talking to His disciples as He explains, He, then, focuses their thoughts on the end of the age — what happens at the harvest? For us liturgical types, this may seem odd, since we focus on that topic at the end of the church year. Jesus is pointing the disciples to that already now, long before the culmination of His ministry, long before the cross and empty tomb are near.

Jesus did this to encourage His disciples. They already had and would again go forth among people who would oppose them, who would reject their message. With this parable, Jesus encouraged the disciples to faithfulness, trusting in the God who knows those who reject the Good News and those who will receive it. Therefore, Christ and His harvest angels are quite capable of separating the weeds from the wheat, the goats from the sheep.

It is an encouragement to know that in the end justice will be done. The demise of the weeds, Jesus taught therefore, will not be pleasant — a “*fiery furnace,*” eternal (Matt. 25:41) and unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12) with plenty of “*weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” On the other hand, all will be well in the end for the righteous wheat — they “*will shine like the sun in the kingdom*” prepared “*from the foundation of the world*” (Matt. 25:34). Thus we will pray today with confidence that well known harvest hymn, “Come Ye Thankful People, Come,” praying, “Even so, Lord, quickly come To Thy final harvest home; Gather Thou Thy people in” (LSB892:4).

Still, there is more to the parable that Jesus doesn't explain. What of that? Indeed, what of our life now as wheat in the world? What does Jesus teach us in this parable about that?

First, the good seed sown by the Son of Man makes sons of the kingdom. Such sons are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14), as we heard St. Paul teach last Sunday, sanctified by the Spirit through hearing “*the word of truth, the gospel of ... salvation,*” being “*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*” (Eph. 1:13). Baptized into Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and so, again, we are led by Him. We become sons of the kingdom through what Christ sows, through His seed.

Christ does not sow weeds. Therefore, Baptism in the name of a false god or done without God's word, is no baptism; it is not of Christ; it's of the enemy. Preaching falsely — for example, that Christ is not true God born in the flesh of the Virgin, or that His sacrifice was not a sufficient ransom price for the sins of the world, or that Jesus was not raised bodily from death — this is not of Christ; it's of the enemy. Or promoting perverted practices in the Lord's Supper — like saying we can do Holy Communion over the internet as even some LCMS pastors were doing during this COVID crisis — these are not of Christ; they're of the enemy, the devil. And they sow not only unbelief but also division.

Second, Jesus doesn't want us to become discouraged — just soberly realistic. Until the final harvest, there will be sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one living side by side. It bears repeating: the sons of the kingdom are children “*born of God*” (John 1:13), “*born from above*” by “*water and the Spirit*” (John 3:3, 5), “*born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*” (1 Pet. 1:23). And that imperishable seed is the message that Christ is your ransom; He paid it with His own “*precious blood ... like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*” (1 Pet. 1:19). Sons of the kingdom are believers, and Peter preaches that your faith and hope are not only in this lamb that was led to the slaughter, but also in Him whom God “*raised ... from the dead and gave ... glory*” (1 Pet. 1:21).

But you see that the enemy works in much the same way. The kingdom increases by sowing seed; therefore, the devil, “always God's ape, trying to imitate all God's things” as Luther says (*Luther's Works*, 41:167-8), does the same thing. He sows seed. It's just that his seed is meant to “deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (Luther, *Small Catechism*, Lord's Prayer, 6<sup>th</sup> Petition). The devil sows weeds for his own little fiefdom, again as Luther says, “when the devil saw that God built such a holy church, he was not idle, and erected his chapel beside it” (*Luther's Works*, 41:167).

Third, even as the master has servants to labor in His field, the enemy also has servants. We not only live among the weeds, but also among the enemy's servants, who to this day sow weeds of deceit and doubt and discontent in the world. St. Paul warned the Ephesian elders “*from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them*” (Acts 20:30). We must beware of them! They profane the name of God, as Luther teaches: “Anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us.” And we should pray, “Protect us from this, heavenly Father!” (Luther, *Small Catechism*, Lord's Prayer, 1<sup>st</sup> Petition)

Indeed, we must beware, for neither the devil nor his servants are an abstraction. They are very real; they are all around us; and with their false teaching, the kingdom of God is not increased. Rather, as we confess, “God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word [taught in its truth and purity] and lead godly lives here in time [surrounded by sons of the evil one] and there in eternity” (Luther, *Small Catechism*, Lord's Prayer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Petition).

Therefore, yes, we can pray, but we can do more. For one, we can keep watch over our pastor and make sure he preaches purely. Two, we can make sure that we are reading the Scriptures, maybe our Confessions, and other orthodox material. Three, we can be discerning of others. Just because someone uses pious god

language on the television, or the radio, or on the internet doesn't mean that he or she is teaching the truth. The internet can be a wonderful thing, but beware. It can also be an especially weedy field of false doctrine! Beware!

Most especially, we need to continue to be recipients of the Son of Man's good seed by Word and Sacrament. God grant that we may abide in Jesus' word, so that we might know the truth (John 8:31-32) and endure in the true faith until the day when the reaping angels gather in the harvest.

Until that day, there are going to be weeds among us. Jesus said, don't pull them out, lest you uproot the good plants. Even when we walked our beans and the field looked good for a time, in a week or two, weeds once too small to be seen, hidden near the beans, would pop up. Impossible to get them all. Nevertheless, even amidst the weeds, we need to bear fruit. Therefore, God grant that on that great and glorious harvest day, covered by His righteousness — a righteousness of His blood and of faith and of faithfulness to His Word — God grant that His glory may be ours, and we might “*shine like the sun in the [eternal] kingdom of [our] Father.*”

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