

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We're back on the farm in today's Gospel lesson; Jesus is out in the field again, sowing seed again, but this time in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, as it used to be called, or the Wheat and the Weeds.

There are some similarities to last week's parable of the Sower. Jesus is Himself the One sowing seed, for example. And He sows nothing but good seed into the field—the field is the world. Moreover, Jesus' seed produces fruit-bearing wheat. We're neither interested in the unfruitful plants in this parable, nor in the yield of the wheat. Indeed, at harvest time, the fruitful wheat gets gathered up and put into the harvest barns regardless the yield.

But this parable has the interesting detail that there is another sower in the field, and he is Jesus' enemy. He sneaks around, comes under the cover of darkness, and sows not good seed, but weeds. And the weeds that result from this seed will get gathered up, too, at the harvest, but they will be bundled up and burned up in the fire.

In the meantime, though, "*Wheat and tares together sown, Unto joy or sorrow grown,*" as the well-known harvest hymn puts it. Yes, Jesus' parable reminds us that until the final harvest, there will be wheat and weeds in the field, "*sons of the kingdom*" and "*sons of the evil one*" living side by side.

So it was in Jesus' day; so it was in the early Church, so it was at the time of the Reformation, so it is today. The enemy, the devil, sows bad seed in the world; with his deceit, he sows discord and strife and division and ultimately unbelief. The sons of the evil one can be our neighbors or coworkers or friends. There might also be some right here in church—although here is not where I would look for them, since good seed is being sown here. Still, hypocrites abound—and false teachers.

Indeed, even as God used His prophets, and later the apostles, and now preachers to spread the good seed, so the enemy, aping God, sends out his false prophets and teachers to sow bad seed in the world.

In Jesus' day, these were the Pharisees, with their twisting of the Scriptures to benefit themselves. So when they misinterpreted God's command concerning the Sabbath laws, Jesus corrected them, and reminded them that God desired that works of mercy be done on the Sabbath, and He reminded them that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, not man for the Sabbath (Matt. 12 and Mark 2). Or again, Jesus called these hypocrites out as they taught the people to "*break the commandment of God for the sake of [their] tradition.*" They were weeds and sowing weeds, honoring God "*with their lips, but their heart [was] far from*

[Him].” Citing Isaiah, Jesus said, “*in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matt. 15:3-9).

Even the disciples, at times, sought to sow a bit of Satan’s bad seed. When Peter tried to get Jesus to travel a different path than suffering and cross, Jesus scolded him, ““*Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*” (Matt. 16:23). And certainly in the years following Jesus’ ascension into heaven, false teachers sowed bad seed. St. Paul warned the Ephesians elders about this, saying, “*after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them*” (Acts 20:29-30), that is, to make sons of the evil one.

In the Reformation age, there were plenty of false teachers, too, sowing weeds. Consider your bulletin insert highlighting Thomas Müntzer; look at the heading; “Twisting the Reformation into a violent rebellion.” And in the text, we read that he “he argued, it was the obligation of all real Christians forcibly to purge the world of wickedness,” directly contradicting what Jesus teaches us in today’s parable. In this way Müntzer was sowing weeds, people who thought that these violent actions and not faith really made one a Christian.

Of course, it’s no different today. Satan still prowls around, and he still “*disguises himself as an angel of light,*” (2 Cor. 11:14) using outwardly pious, godly preachers, but really wolves in sheep’s clothing, to spread the noxious seed of false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Here’s a particularly egregious example. On Issues Etc., the other day, I heard an analysis of a sermon preached in one of America’s largest evangelical churches. The sermon was all about getting dental check-ups and colonoscopies. Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m all for good oral hygiene and getting regular check-ups. I’m all for getting your colon checked as a preventative for cancer. We’ve even had some health busses here at Zion in our parking lot, offering low-cost health check-ups. But is that why one comes to church? To be encouraged to go to the dentist or to visit your gastroenterologist?

And how did people leave that church on that day? Without sins forgiven? Without the assurance that in Christ Jesus there is salvation, that they are loved in Christ? Without their faith strengthened by words of cross and resurrection? What else could they think but, “If only I get to the dentist this week, then I will be right with God?” What utter nonsense! What a bunch of trivialities that those people cheered and applauded at this megachurch! What a bunch of weeds that were sown there on this particular Sunday—but that and many more weeds are being sown throughout the world by the devil through such treachery.

Thus the importance that we Lutherans place on the good seed of Jesus, the pure preaching and teaching of God’s word for us today that makes believers, true disciples, sons of the kingdom—and that pure teaching proclaims that Jesus Christ is atoning sacrifice for our sins. That pure teaching proclaims that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. That pure teaching proclaims that to look to Jesus alone, to confess Him alone as Lord, to believe in Him whom God raised from the dead is to be a good plant. Good plants do not come from bad seed. Bad seed produces weeds. Good seed — pure teaching, proper sacraments — these produce the plants that bear fruit. And this fruit is not destined for the furnace of fire, but it will be “safely gathered in” to the Lord’s “harvest home” when that day comes.

Therefore, rejoice you “*sons of the kingdom.*” Rejoice that you are a good planting of the Lord, good seed bearing good fruit. Rejoice even though it seems as if you are surrounded by enemies, by “*sons of the evil one,*” that you are hemmed in on every side. Rejoice because there is a greater crowd of witnesses that surround you, pointing you to Jesus. Rejoice, looking to Jesus, and remembering that “*after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you*” (1 Pet. 5:10); that is, with His angels, Jesus will gather you to Himself; He will call you righteous and blessed and worthy of the inheritance of sons; and you “*will shine like the sun in the kingdom of [your] Father.*” God grant us ears to hear this word of encouragement and comfort.

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