

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church

Let God Be God

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

Matthew 13:24 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'²⁸ "An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'²⁹ "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

In order for any group of people to work well together, everyone in the group needs to understand the role that they are to play. This is true in the workplace. It doesn't work out very well if everyone tries to be the boss or if no one wants to be the boss. This is true in the family. When Mom and Dad understand their roles as parents and the children understand their roles as well, things work out. When parents act like children or when children try to think that they are the parents, things don't go so well. This same truth can be applied to the kingdom of God. The Lord has given us all roles to play in the kingdom. Things work out well when we understand our role and carry it out faithfully. It doesn't work so well when we neglect our role or try to take someone else's role. This is especially true when we think of God's role. It is important for each of us as Christians to understand what God's role is in his kingdom and ***Let God Be***

God. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Unfortunately, with our sinful natures wanting us to try to take over God's role, it can be quite difficult at times.

Jesus teaches his disciples about the Lord's role in his kingdom by using a parable. The picture he uses in this parable is that of sowing a seed. Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.*" If you remember, last week Jesus used the same picture. That's not surprising. Jesus knew that the picture of a farmer sowing seed would be one that was easily understood by his audience. This time, however, the point of comparison is quite different. Last week, the seed was God's Word being proclaimed to different people. In this parable, the seed are the people. Jesus said that the good seed stood for the "*sons of the kingdom.*" This is a reference to believers. The one sowing the seed in this parable is also different. Last week, the sower was a preacher of God's Word. In this parable, Jesus tells us that the one who sows the seed stands for none other than Jesus himself—the Son of Man.

With this simple illustration, Jesus taught his disciples an important truth. God plants his believers in the world. As preachers of the gospel, the disciples would be sowing seed in a sense. But they needed to realize that the one who would plant that seed and cause it to grow was God. They could not take credit for the results of their work of preaching and teaching the Word.

This lesson is also important for us to learn as Jesus' disciples today. God still maintains his job of making believers. He has given us the privilege of being a part of the process by bringing the Word to the hearts of unbelievers. But only the Lord can convert those hearts and take people from unbelief to faith. He alone has the power to plant the seeds of his people into the field of the world. This truth is helpful for us to remember for two reasons. The first thing it does is smash down our pride. If we see some successful results from our work as Jesus' disciples—if our neighbor becomes a member of the church through our witness or a straying member starts attending again because of our encouragement—our sinful nature wants us to take the credit. We'd like to think that it was because we said or did the right things that we saw a good result. The fact is—the credit belongs completely to God. He alone can turn hearts of stone to hearts that beat with the lifeblood of the gospel. This truth is also helpful for us to remember because it takes the pressure off us when we are witnesses of the gospel to others. We can remember that it isn't all up to us. We can be confident knowing that the Lord will accomplish his work through his Word. He has all the power to change hearts. That is his job. Our job is simply to witness. When we understand these roles, it is a blessing for us and for the church.

In the second part of this parable Jesus fills his disciples in on another important role the Lord carries out—the role of Judge. Jesus continued the parable by saying: *“But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.*

Along with the good seed that was sown in the field, there were also weeds that were sown by an enemy. The weeds Jesus spoke of were very troublesome to farmers. For one thing, these weeds looked the same as wheat while they were growing. It wasn’t until they were mature that the two could be easily distinguished. The other problem was the fact these type of weeds were poisonous and would make you sick if they were eaten together with the wheat. Jesus told his disciples that these weeds stood for the unbelievers in the world. The one who sows the weeds is the devil. The important point of comparison is what happens to the weeds. Instead of trying to pull them up immediately, the owner waits until the time of the harvest and then he sends out his servants to gather the weeds and burn them before they gather the wheat. This actually would not have seemed like the best practice to farmers who heard the parable. But it perfectly illustrated Jesus’ point.

It was not until the time of the harvest that the weeds and the wheat would be separated. The point here is that the great judgment between unbelievers and believers will not take place until the Last Day. And God is the one who will do the separating, using his angels as his workers. That is his job. As Jesus said, *“The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”* It was important for the disciples to remember this as well as they did their work. They were not the ones who were responsible for judging the world and sending unbelievers to their destruction. That was God’s job. Their job was to proclaim the truth to anyone who could hear.

It is important for us to realize what this part of the parable is saying to us today and also what it is not saying. This parable is not saying that we should tolerate sin and unbelief in the church because God will sort everything out in the end. The Lord has given us the specific task of calling sinners to repentance and exposing false teachers within the church. What this parable does say is that we are not given the task of exterminating unbelievers from this world. That is God's role as the Judge of the world. Christians have gotten themselves into great trouble throughout history when they have tried to take this role on themselves. Some examples would be the Crusades, where many were killed in the name of the Lord or the Inquisition where people were put to death because of heresy. These Christians failed to remember that God has not given the church the sword to serve as his executioner. I pray that this would never become a temptation for any of us, but in a world where religious wars are still being fought, we need to remember that unbelief itself is no reason to go to war. God will sort the unbelievers from the believers at the end of time.

There is also a great amount of comfort for us in the final verses of this parable as we see the righteous shining like stars on the Great Day of Judgment. Sometimes it can be difficult to be good seed among the weeds. It can be difficult to live in the midst of a sinful world with so much opposition all around us. It's good to remember the end of the story. It's good when we remember that everything works out well when we simply let God be God. He will keep all of his promises. He will accomplish his task of planting believers in this world through his Word. He will also accomplish his task of judging the world at the end of time. And that is something we can look forward to, because we know that we can stand in that judgment—covered over by the blood of Jesus Christ and awaiting eternal glory. **Amen.**

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