

"Letting Go Until Harvest"

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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²⁴He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank you for planting your Word within us as good seed, germinating new life through Jesus Christ, you Son. May we grow into His likeness. Amen.

Our Gospel for this morning poses an interesting contrast to it's related, and more well known, distant cousin in the Gospel of Mark. We know the parable of Wheat and Chaff, how God will separate the two on the threshing floor, the wheat will be stored into barns and the chaff – that is, the stalks from the harvested wheat – will be cast out and burned in unquenchable fires. We recall Jesus' parable of the Sower, how some seeds are sown in thorns, others on rocky ground, and others in fertile soil. Some never take root and grow. Others grow only to be choked off and die. While the seeds sown in the good soil yield 30, 60, and 100 fold. Truth is, Jesus tells many parables about seeds, planting, and the harvest- and most of them are familiar to us.

Which makes our Gospel for this morning a bit disorienting. We think it is one we know; but then, we hear of the evil one sowing weeds in with the good seeds, and, of God commanding that the weeds be allowed to grow until harvest- we discover it is a radically different story. And it can be troubling.

I allowed this uncomfortable feeling set with me all week, hoping and praying that God would grant me a vision for today's message. I did the scholarly background work. I recalled that Jesus was preaching to the crowds, while later, the interpreting of the parable came during his private instruction to his disciples. Some scholars believe the interpreting of the parable was done by early Christian editors of the text, and others believe the form in the original Greek was carefully created to assist in the memorization of the text during the first couple of generations of the oral tradition. I recognized the fact that our lesson is largely descriptive, not proscriptive; that is, Jesus generally isn't telling us to do something, he is describing the kingdom of heaven- though he does tell us the Lord of the Harvest doesn't want us mucking around in his fields.

I can envision members of the Early Church hearing this parable, looking around at the violence and fearful environment of persecution at the hands of merciless Romans, nodding their head and saying, "Yea, I understand. We are living in the midst of evil weeds. They are all around us. The end is coming when they are going to get theirs." Those early Christians may have been tempted to lash out in vengeance against those weeds, to stick a concealed dagger between the ribs of an unsuspecting Roman guard. So perhaps, they were given assurance that, if they remained patient and non violent, God would deal with the weeds. Retributive violence would be averted. The Gospel would be served. God would be pleased.

Driving home from choir Thursday evening, I turned from West Walworth Road onto Atlantic Avenue, and there, on the right side of the road were two fields of wheat. The sun was setting in the west and the fields were simply beautiful in the evening light. Our Gospel lesson immediately came to mind. I looked carefully, to see all that I could see, to take in as much detail as possible. I noticed that the fields were not perfect, there was not a uniform, homogeneous growth of wheat. At various occasional places there were weeds sticking up; a milkweed plant here, a thistle there. Perhaps the weeds accounted for only a fraction of a percent, in the midst of an otherwise perfect field of wheat. And it dawned on me.

If I stopped the car and attempted to pull all the weeds out of those fields (I might be arrested for trespassing!), I would be tramping all around, walking on the good wheat, making a mess, going from weed to weed, leaving chaos in my wake. Sure, I could get the weeds out. But there wouldn't be much left of the wheat field for a harvest. It would be mostly destroyed, like the aftermath of a violent hail storm.

Consider all the times throughout Church history when we have failed to heed Jesus' parable, when the Church has been unfaithful to the Gospel, when it has gone hunting for weeds leaving behind devastating destruction. The Church pays for generations. Remember the Inquisition, and the search for heretics. Recall the Crusades, and the

thirst for the blood of infidels- Muslims who occupied the Holy Lands. "The Scarlet Letter" and the Salem witch trials both bring to mind past forays into the Lord's fields; and non Christians are quick to cite such blemishes of history, while ignoring the vast majority of faithful attention to the Gospel.

Think that this violation doesn't happen in the modern era? Consider "the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose mission is to "to promote and safeguard the doctrine on the faith and morals throughout the Catholic world."" It is the modern day Inquisition, vetting scholars such as Fr. Curran and Hans Kung, whose mission of the Congregation is "in service to the Truth: correcting theological error, silencing dissenting theologians, and stomping down heresy wherever it may rear its ugly head." (<http://www.ratzingerfanclub.com/>).

Did anyone see the chilling video this past week from the International Court in the Hague? Of Serbian Christian soldiers rounding up Muslim men and boys, standing them up before an open pit and shooting each one? Hiding behind excuses of ancient orthodoxy and modern piety, wielding the threat of excommunication, Orthodox church leaders point the finger of blame at everyone but themselves. Just where was the bishop of Serbia hiding?

It is human nature to trample the wheat in an effort to purge the field of the weeds. Jesus tells us that it is primal, and that it needs to stop.

When the slaves of the Lord of the Harvest approach Him and ask permission for them to clean up some weeds, the Lord replies "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matthew 13:29b-30)

It's not Christianity's business to be tearing things up in an effort to destroy the evil of this world. Jesus affirms today that it is God's prerogative to be the judge and final authority. Just walk away, Jesus tells us. Walk away and wait.

This is hard medicine for us to swallow, at least it is for me, I must admit. In this past week we learn about a little 12 year old city boy, minding his own business walking home, is chased and hunted down like a dog, then is executed by a repeat felon and two time loser, who admitted to police that he didn't even know the child, that he did it for the thrill of killing.

Frederick's dream? To go to college, graduate and get a good job, so he could help his mother pay the bills.

Remember his name- **Frederick William Lewis Jr.**

I'll tell you what- I want to run right out there into the field of wheat and rip out that God forsaken weed, and fry him in an electric chair!

But my ways are not God's ways.

Jesus tells us to be patient. Wait. Be prepared. Trim your lamps. Watch. It can come at any watch in the night. Remain faithful. No one knows when. It is God's field, not ours. It is God who has grown the good wheat, not us, not the Evil One.

The pietistic Conservative and the lazy Liberal might take this parable out of context and draw the same, inaccurate conclusions from it- that disciples of Christ are to take a hands off – Laze fare – attitude to the social conditions – the poverty, the racism, the injustice of the world. On the contrary, when embracing the larger picture of the Gospel and the life of Jesus, the faithful recognize the fact that Jesus reaches out to the poor, the broken, the despised, and the lowly. He radically changes their life for the better – in a revolution of the meek, who will inherit the earth, a conversion of the poor, who will receive the kingdom of heaven, a complete reversal of fortune for the hungry, who will be filled, a complete turn around for the merciful, who will receive mercy. (paraphrased from Matthew 5).

And we are enlisted to be his instruments of social change. We are his disciple who are to prepare the ground for his coming, change the world using God's kingdom and Jesus' life as our pattern, so that when God's kingdom does come, it will roll into town like a joyful, New Orleans parade.

But, be forewarned: The Evil One has been doing some sowing of his own. It is the Evil One, not God, who brings sin into this world. He is working against us. He is making efforts to sabotage our work. But the Evil One will not reign or triumph, because this field here is God's field. This field here is God's Kingdom!

This field here is God's Kingdom. That sidewalk in Rochester is God's sidewalk. That mass grave in Bosnia is God's good earth. The children that are raped, hunted, and killed in the province of Darfur, Sudan are God's children. **“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”** (Matthew 25:40). The evil of this world will have to face the music in God's time, will have to stand before the Lord in judgment, and will be brought to the precipice of fire.

Jesus reveals a bit of God's Kingdom this morning, when he tells us about God's judgment. That judgment is very real. It isn't up to us to decide who goes to the fire and who goes to the storehouses. It isn't left up to us to be God's proxy judges- even though the Jerry Falwells' and the Pat Robertsons' of this world would lead you to believe otherwise.

God is the final authority. It's God say, and His call alone. God is in control. After all, this is God's Kingdom; and don't ever forget that.

It may be unsettling to some, who may fear the judgment of God at some, unknown future time. But there is assurance here in this Gospel parable of Jesus.

That assurance is this: It is God who planted you, not the Evil One. While each of us will pass in critical review before the Lord, know that it was God who made you, God who nurtured you, and that **God is looking forward to collecting us up when the time of harvest comes.** God is a timely judge. A wise jurist. A just magistrate. In this, we are invited to trust.

The Lord's purpose is not, nor will it ever be thwarted. Some might look at today's field and only see the weeds.

But the faithful disciples of Jesus looks at the field and knows that it is God's field, God's wheat, God's decision when it is to be harvested, and God's judgment that will triumph over all. Be assured, **the chosen, faithful have no reason to fear God's judgment.**

There is work to be done, dear sisters and brothers. Let go of the evil. Let it go. Focus on what you can do for the good, what you can do to welcome God's kingdom when it does come.

Jesus is looking for a few good workers. Won't you be one?

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.