

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

18th Sunday of Quarantine (19th overall)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 44:6-8

Psalm 86:11-17

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

07/19/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

24[Jesus] put before [the crowds] 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!”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Wheat and Creation

Good morning! I'm not sure if you know this about me, but I'm not what you would call a patient person. I make minute rice in 59 seconds, I can't stand it when someone is walking or driving slowly, and I can rarely stand or sit still for any length of time. Any task that requires patience and time is outside of my ability. Heck, one of the reasons I like meditation is because it forces me to slow down, to do something I'm horrible at, for just a short time.

I'm also the type of person who can't resist scratching that itch. If it's a scab, I'll pick at it, and if it's a shiny red button, look out. When I was little, I was so bad about this that once in the car with my dad, I asked what a specific button did. My father, by this time, was aware of my inability to not fidget with things, and so he raised the bar and very seriously and sternly told me that if I touched that button... everyone in the car would die... I pushed the button.

So the text today is a very clear reminder that I shouldn't be a farmer. I can't pull out those annoying weeds AND I need to wait for months before I can mess with them?! Impossible! But the story today is so much more than just a little reminder that I should stay away from agricultural pursuits. The text today is a potent reminder to the Christian community to

remember that it's the head of the household, God, who determines who is a wheat or weed.

As I mentioned last week, we find ourselves in the midst of several parables in the middle of the Gospel of Matthew. Of the seven or eight in this section, roughly half are based on farming or plant life. And, just like last week, we find ourselves jumping verses in the middle of the story. We open our reading on the same boat that Jesus was teaching from last week. Jesus shares several parables, but our reading skips ahead to a time later when Jesus is alone with the disciples. It is here, away from the crowd, that his followers ask Jesus what the parables mean, and we're treated with his explanation.

Now, while Jesus already breaks everything down for us, it always helps to dig a little deeper. So, scholars have worked to help us form a picture of the context for which this story was written. Remember, we approach every story in the Gospels from at least three different points of perspective. The first is the original occurrence, the event that supposedly happened sometime around the year 30 B.C.E. The second is the context of the Gospel writer's community, the who and why for whom this was written. For the Gospel of Matthew, that's sometime around the year 80 B.C.E. The third point is our own context, here in 2020 in Hampton, VA.

(in my home office!) We're usually pretty good about remembering and unpacking the first and last points, but it's that second one that we can often forget.

For the writer of Matthew, this was written for a community of mixed believers. Some are Gentile Christians, those who have no Jewish background but have come to believe. Others are Jewish Christians, Jews who believed in the resurrection and that Jesus was the Messiah. From the heavy use of Hebrew and Jewish traditions in the Gospel of Matthew, it's clear that this community was heavily Jewish. But there were also Jews who didn't believe the Christ story. And it's with this specific context and community in mind that the writer of Matthew pens this story. What do we do with those who don't believe?

It's a question from 2,000 years ago which is still relevant today. In a culture of many faiths, what is the role of a Christian in regards to others? That's a larger question than we can tackle fully today, but I think that leaving others alone is a good start.

It is not the job of Christians to decide the difference between a wheat and a weed. In fact, here's a little detail that makes the text so much more interesting! Fr. Daniel J. Harrington writes this about the word used for weeds: *"The Greek zizanion refers to a noxious weed that in its early stages*

closely resembles wheat and cannot be readily distinguished from it.”

Another writes that this “*wheat-like weed [is] common throughout the Near East.*” Don’t you just love it when the text gives you juicy little details like that?! Something that completely opens up the text!

So the story changes dramatically. Can we even tell the difference between what is the weed and what is the wheat? But like I said, it’s not our job to decide! As the scholars pointed out, in the early stages of growth it’s not obvious which plant is which. And within this little moment of time it’s possible that the plant could be anything.

This text challenges us to think both macro and micro. In a larger sense, we look around the world and we are forced to realize that we don’t know. Fr. Harrington writes that “*The message of patient tolerance and leaving to God the settling of scores is timely today also. For a world in which so many conflicts occur on the basis of religion, race, ethnic identity, and so forth, this is sound advice... And, of course, readers of all generations need to be reminded of the wondrous promise and surpassing value of the kingdom of God that are sketched so neatly in the little parable pairs.*”

But on a micro level the text asks so much more. It takes the camera that we’ve been pointing at each and every other person and turns it around

so that all the focus is on our own person. And in that moment, we are asked an important question: What are you? A wheat or a weed? More importantly, what do you WANT to be? Amen.