

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 44:6-8

Psalms 86:11-17

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

07/23/2023

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.

Crops

Good morning! Our Gospel lesson today features an enemy that comes and sows weeds into the wheat of a farmer’s field. In the 1970’s a potentially far more sinister field invasion was also occurring. Sometime after 1978 crop circles began to appear throughout the UK. Aliens were among us, and we had found evidence of their parking. Through the 1980’s they picked up in frequency and popularity until the 1990’s when the true culprits came forward. Doug Bower and Dave Chorley had been hard at work causing mischief with nothing more than some rope, a board, and some wire tied to their hats. In the cover of night these two would go out into fields and stamp intricate designs and patterns that are now infamous. We now know these are made by humans, but it appears a small group of what is apparently called “croppies”¹ still believe...

So maybe it wasn’t as sinister as we first thought, and while certainly an inconvenience, it pales in comparison to the work of “the enemy” in

¹ <https://www.livescience.com/26540-crop-circles.html>

today's text. Our story continues the planting theme of last week and like last week's lesson is rare in that Jesus (1.) provides an explanation, and (2.) it's actually understandable!

It seems that scholars don't like it when Jesus explains what he means, because the straightforward nature of the text means they have less to say, go figure! My favorite Matthew commentary written by Douglas R.A. Hare only devotes a little over one page to the parable. And I understand, it's a seemingly straightforward tale. Hare writes that *"the interpretation of the parable found in verses 36-43 applies the parable to the time of the church. The risen Christ sows good seed in the world and this creates the church. Into the midst of this church the devil sows people who do not belong in the kingdom, 'children of the evil one.' [The writer of] Matthew is greatly disturbed by the mixed state of the church, which contains many who enthusiastically call Jesus 'Lord, Lord' but refuse to follow his ethical teaching... By means of this interpretation Matthew assures himself and others that a day of reckoning will come to these pseudodisciples; the glorified Christ will send forth his angels to purify the church and all who disregard moral law."*² Now, if you're saying to yourself, "That's a complicated way of saying us 'good' Christians are safe," just wait, because he continues with an absolute gem at the end of his commentary, writing *"the intention of these verses is not to assure good Christians of their predestined salvation as good fish but to warn them that they must persevere in doing what Jesus teaches. Not lip service, but lived faith is required of Jesus' followers."*³

² Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 155.

³ *Ibid.* p. 156.

But within this seemingly simple story that Jesus even does a good job of explaining lies a serious challenge for Christians. The first is to remember that if we are the wheat, it isn't our job to worry about the sorting! While it's important to care and support one another in our faith, that doesn't mean we get to stick our noses up at any seemingly little mistake someone else makes. In fact, we're called to share resources and aid with them. The weeds that grow with the wheat would have consumed nutrients from the good soil too. Water and other aid would have helped both to grow. One detail that we completely miss is that this weed, *zizania*, looks a lot like wheat, and would have been hard to decipher for the average worker in the beginning. It's as if Jesus is saying that quick judgment is dangerous, that the future may have a different outcome than anticipated.

My favorite interpretation of this text approaches it from a different perspective. John T. Carroll, a New Testament professor right up the road at Union Presbyterian Seminary writes: *"The parable, like so many in Matthew's Gospel, paints a realistic picture of the world. Good and bad, constructive and destructive are inextricably bound together. (In Romans 7:15-21, Paul observes that even the good we know and intend can produce harm we scarcely imagined.) Helpful and harmful are mixed up all around us, and indeed within us—as persons and as communities."*⁴ I like to take it even further and suggest that instead of us being either the wheat or the weeds, we are the field. The Gospel lesson then becomes a warning about the unchecked growth of words and actions that choke out the growth of God's kingdom. Because for Matthew, that really is the ultimate reality, the joy of a place where God's work is given a chance to

⁴<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16/commentary-on-matthew-1324-30-36-43-6>

grow fully and wonderfully, becoming sustenance for a world desperate for something good. The question for each of us then is this: will we choose to bear fruit worthy of God's kingdom, or will we be a scorched and burnt landscape, full of hate, regret, and choices that cut us off from the goodness of communion with God? It seems the choice is ours... Amen.