

9th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

God is Patient for His Field

How could his neighbor do it? As the farmer walked among his field, inspecting quite closely the year's crop, he brushed his foot against the growing stalks. He couldn't shake the question, "How could my neighbor do this to me?" They had been feuding. But this? This was on another level entirely. It's one thing to be mischievous. It's one thing to play pranks. But this?

His neighbor had purposefully destroyed the farmer's work, his pride, joy, and livelihood. He kicked at the growing plants in his field and sighed. He noticed the tell tale signs of the problem scattered throughout his field. Weeds among his crop. And not just any weeds. The black heads of the "bearded darnel" stood out in stark contrast with the brown heads of his livelihood, the wheat.

Months of caring for these plants, and half of them were worthless. No one knew of the deception until it was practically harvest time. How could they? The wheat and the weeds looked identical until they began to ripen. Oh, how he wished that someone would have noticed. Once, again the sadness seemed to crush him as he considered what his enemy had done to him and his.

Something had to be done. He knew it. His workers knew it. The millers and the bakers who were depending on him knew it. He couldn't just lump the darnel, this weed, in with the wheat, not unless he wanted to poison people. Some of this darnel, if not all, probably did carry that lethal fungus that the plant was known for. So, something had to be done.

His workers kept telling him that they could remove the darnel now, and probably get away with saving some of the wheat crop. The smart farmer would probably listen to them. The smarter farmer would probably just destroy the field and start over from scratch. But to do either of those things was to give up what he had worked so hard for and what he had cared so deeply for. And the farmer was determined.

So the farmer did what the workers did not expect, and probably not what his enemy was expecting. He decided to wait. Wait until every single stalk was ripe. Wait until every singly stalk revealed itself to be either wheat or weed. The farmer decided to be patient. He would not let one stalk be lost, nor let one weed be mixed in with the wheat. He would be patient. He would be patient for his field.

What Jesus describes in his parable is really nothing less than a story we have heard a thousand times just told in a new way. It really is the story of Adam and Eve, is it not? The devil came in to God's field and sowed chaos. We know this story well. Maybe too well to let our emotions be stirred anymore. But consider how sad that story really is. Consider how sad God would have been. Not long before God had made all and said that it was very good. Perfect even. And then one of God's servants, betrays him, betrays Adam and Eve and tempts them into damnation. Satan couldn't do anything against God directly and so he attacks God indirectly, through his craftsmanship.

What followed was the destruction of everything perfect that God had created, and the introduction of everything evil that exists in the world. It's a sad story. The parable of the wheat and weeds echoes that Genesis 3 account. And much like in Genesis chapter 3, Jesus tells us that this farmer had options. Maybe he could have started over, started from scratch. Maybe he could have destroyed the bad seed

that had infected his world, but he instead chooses a different route, a patient route. God is patient for his field. And in that patience we see a very important attribute of God, an attribute of God written in the fact that we are even here right now: Grace.

In our reading, Jesus is by the lake, in the boat. He continues his sermon of parables to the crowds of people that surround him. It's obvious to everyone that Jesus is using parables to teach. He even starts off this one by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like...." But the crowds are left to ponder the meaning. It's only later, when Jesus leaves the crowds that the disciples press him for an explanation, "Lord, tell us what the parable of the wheat and the weeds means."

Jesus explains, the farmer is God. The workers are his angels. The enemy is the devil. The field is the world. The wheat are those who believe and trust in God. The weeds are those seeds that the devil sows, unbelief and distrust in God, seeds which have taken root in so many hearts in our world today. Jesus explains that the perfect wheat field has been ruined by those seeds the devil sows.

Like weeds entering a wheatfield, when sin entered God's perfect world, creation was ruined. It speaks volumes of the love that God has for us, that he did what he did. What incredible patience. What incredible love. What incredible and undeserved grace that God has for his field. That farmer in Jesus' parable, commanded his workers to not uproot those weeds until harvest time, "Lest you uproot some of the wheat along with it." Every stalk is important to God. Every believer is loved by God. Each one of you is cared for, looked after, and considered precious in his sight. God is patient for the wheat, that much is clear.

But God is also patient for his entire field, too. The field is the world, not just the church. God isn't just patient with believers, but unbelievers too. That's why we call this life our time of grace. It is this time period, these 80 to 90 years that God gives to people to learn about his salvation, to believe in Jesus, and so become that wheat that God intended us to be. Now, not every stalk ripens at the same time. If that farmer would have allowed his workers to uproot the weeds before the harvest was ready, what would they have done with the plants that were still green? The only easy way to tell wheat and dandelion apart is at harvest time, when the plants ripen. Wheat becomes brown, dandelion becomes black. Would some of those workers maybe make a mistake, leaving some weeds, or uprooting some wheat? God even extends his love to those who reject him that they might repent and they might know the cross as we do.

God is patient for the entire field. Are you?

There is a temptation for us all to just give up on the world. There's too much sin. There's too much hatred. There's not enough kindness, understanding, open ears, hospitality, or warm hearts. There's too much political divide. Even what united us just 10 years ago seems to have evaporated. And so there's a temptation to think, "Wouldn't it just be great to have all Christians have their own little island? Their own little country off somewhere and let the world just suffer without us?" Christians have tried that by the way. They were called Monks. Even Martin Luther became one. But after being one for a while, he said this, "For we are not made for fleeing human company but for living in society and sharing good and evil. As human beings, we must help one another to bear all kinds of human misfortune and the curse that has come upon us...You have no call to pick up your feet and run away, but to stay put, to stand and battle against every kind of temptation like a knight, and with patience to see it through and to triumph." It's so easy for us to think that it would be better for us to be apart from this world so that

we wouldn't face various hardships. But to do so would be to abandon our God-given purpose in this world.

We are wheat in the same field as the weeds. And it is by God's grace that this is so.

God's patience for his field is why we are here. Back in Genesis 3, God could have started all over: destroyed everything and started fresh. And the sad story of Adam and Eve's fall would have ended there and it would have forever remained a tragedy. But instead, God made a promise. God made a promise to his enemy, the devil, but also to us. God promised a Messiah. And when Jesus died on that cross, that sad story of Adam and Eve, that sad story of the farmer's ruined field, had a miraculously happy conclusion. You and I were delivered from death by the same blow delivered to crush Satan. God's patience, God's promise paid off and our sins, even our impatient and unloving attitudes to the people all around us were washed away in a cleansing flood of mercy.

Now God has told us to be patient. Jesus explained.

"The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 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. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

A time is coming, where God will say, "You are my wheat. You, who trust and believe in my Son Jesus, will shine like the sun. You are my righteous ones, because my Son has died for you." A time comes soon where God will sort out the weeds and they will go to the place where their actions have led them.

But what are we to do until that time? Run away from the world? Gather all the wheat in one place and live apart from the weeds? No. It is not our job to separate the wheat and the weeds. That's the Lord's job. Rather, God urges us to live with our eyes on the coming harvest; to be a bright light in a dark world. Christ encourages us to live as wheat among the weeds of this world—to reflect kindness and mercy and love; to pray fervently for those that have rejected Christ so that they turn to God instead and know that we are not living in some sad story with a tragic ending. Christ reminds us to live out our hope and joy in words and actions that those in God's field will be found as wheat come harvest.

Pray for those in this world that you think have demonstrated themselves to be weeds. Pray that they the Holy Spirit use their time to be filled with grace. I pray that we do not grow heartless or give up on the many sinful people we see, whether that be our enemies, or neighbors or even family who do not know Christ. I pray that we do not give up on them for there is still time before the harvest. May God work wonders in their hearts and use us as his messengers. And finally, may God keep each of us deeply rooted in his promises fulfilled so that when that day finally does come, it will be a joy. Amen.