

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

As we look out our windows or as we look over our fences into the culture of the world, we tend to miss the small but wonderful and just plain down good things happening in the world. We miss the good because our view is restricted by our envious, jealous, limited, judgmental human perspective. What we see is the racial differences that lead to tension, the political differences that lead to tension, socioeconomical differences that lead to tension and much strife.

From our perspective we conclude that if you are not like me then you are my enemy, you are evil, and you are the cause for all that is wrong in the world. Our focus is on the fault in the world and in turn, we point out whose fault it all is...of course, the fault is not our own, it's theirs. You all know who they are...THEY are the ones who form all our opinions...“they” say this and “they” say that. *They* say it's because we have taken prayer out of the schools. *They* say it's all the black folks protesting and *they* say it's white privilege. *They* say the community is broken because of gay rights. *They* say it's the Democrats and *they* say it's the Republicans who are destroying our democracy. *They* say it's the wealthy and others the poor. *They* say it's the kids today...the very same thing *They* said about us some years ago. *They* say if you are not like me, then you are wrong or just evil and the cause for all that is wrong. And if only *THEY* thought like me, listened to me, and lived as I live then *they* all would be better off. But yet, even knowing all of this we all know too how boring it will be if we were to tune a piano to one note...because we know it takes many different notes to make the beautiful noise we call music. *They* don't say that, I do.

So is it “THEY” who cause the tension or is it our own ignorance and lack of faith and understanding that forms our various opinions that turn into our very own personal preferred facts that might just be causing some tension? I wonder if “THEY” can look into a bag of seeds and see which one is good and which one is bad? I also wonder if “THEY” determine who is in and who is out...or who is the wheat and who is the weed? No need too...we all know *THEY* are the weeds and they need to go. Interestingly, we've all survived for thousands of years with mosquitos, cockroaches, poison ivy, and many other irritants like weeds for so long. Maybe, just maybe the Master was right when he replied to the slaves wanting to gather the weeds:

²⁹ ..., 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest;... (Matthew 13:29)

This parable of the wheat and weeds within our appointed Gospel lesson today reveals a critical understanding about Matthew's Gospel and hopefully more understanding of our own perspective of the world around us today. The Gospel of Matthew, itself, is distinguished by his use of pairings such as what we have today with the wheat and the weeds. Matthew uses other opposing images...images such as good and bad trees, houses built on rock verses the sand, God and mammon, dogs and what is holy, pearls and swine, the narrow and wide gate, sheep and goats, and now today, wheat and weeds.¹

These pairings stem from Matthew's concern over the mixed state of the church in his time. More specifically, Matthew is concerned with the position of these early Christian churches

¹ Borsch, Frederick Houk, *Many Many Things in Parables, Extravagant Stories of New Community*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 1988. Chapter 8, *Do You Want Us To Gather The Weeds?* Page 74.

within Israel, or in its relationship to Judaism. Keep in mind, Matthew's gospel itself is written for and to a Jewish Christian audience living within the immediate proximity of the homeland itself. Matthew's concern and his preaching is asking how do these Christian communities, who don't even as yet call themselves Christian, and probably don't even have a clue that they are something different than a Jew...how do they exist then within and with a community of gentiles or in a mixed state of faith.

While this Gospel may not emphasize Jewish ritual law, it does however undergird the language and the feel of the Gospel and for me this also shows in the pairings that we hear in this Gospel. So we hear this and we conclude that one is bad or that one is evil and the other is good, righteous, or holy...and we conclude this because we know "they" are the weeds...*the evil weeds*. Our attitude about these pairings could be undergirded also from John the Baptist's powerful description of what is to come:

¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

(Matthew 3:12)

We like these "pairings" found throughout Matthew because we use these pairings to justify our own self-righteousness. And we do so because we can easily choose the good over the evil. And this develops in our minds that if I do thus and such then I will be the favored, I'll be the good one and not the evil one. We then use this to establish a vision of our congregation and ourselves as well as a vision or opinion about the heathen environment we exist in and we ignore our own problems within ourselves and within the ranks of the faithful. We disregard in ourselves the lovelessness, the lack of generosity, and our own unwillingness to forgive. We disregard or just simply ignore the spiritual ruination of others through our judgment based on what *THEY* say...be they Christians or otherwise.²

When Matthew addresses, in this Gospel, the mixed state of the church, he is NOT saying that the church ought not mix with others, he is recognizing and addressing the ongoing issues within Christian Body itself, but he is also addressing how that body sets within the place in which it is planted...they are not simply weeds out there to be uprooted and thrown into the fires of hell, we are to simply exist together until GOD's judgment...not ours because it is God and God alone who knows who is wheat and who are the weeds.

If we look closely and honestly, we may find that *THEY* are us, or just like us. Looking then from our sinful human standard, who do you say is the wheat or who are the weeds?

This is the time of the year when I would go on retreat that involved the writing of an icon and as I worked on this sermon this week, I recalled a prayer that I used quite a bit at the start of my day when writing an icon. The prayer of mine is insignificant and not worth mentioning but the prayer was based on these words from Elihu who is the comforter to Job:

¹⁴ "Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders. (Job 37:14)

² My words regarding Matthew's concern with "the mixed state of the church" stem from: Borsch, Frederick Houk, *Many Many Things in Parables, Extravagant Stories of New Community*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 1988. Chapter 8, *Do You Want Us To Gather The Weeds?*, page 74, along with C. W. F. Smith, "The Mixed State of the Church in Matthew's Gospel," *JBL* 82 (1963): 149-168.

As we consider Elihu's words to Job within a troubling world and the culture that seems to persuade us to see ourselves as wheat among the weeds may we also consider what St. Paul is saying to us today:

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

Let both of them grow together until the harvest. Let's not forget that Jesus teaches us many things in parables. Perhaps Jesus is teaching us that we get tangled up with ourselves and attempting to figure out and conclude whose in and whose out, who is the righteous and who is evil, or who is the wheat and who is the weed? Perhaps Jesus is telling us that we ought NOT focus on ourselves and focus on God and all God has done for us.

In light of this, I then appeal to you as St. Paul does to the church in Rome:

^{12:1} I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual worship*. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:1-5)

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As we view the world with our eyes, our hearts, and our opinions, may we remember that there is a mixed bag of things happening out there, in here, and within our own hearts. BUT, with all the mess of struggle and strife it is not solved by making everyone like me, or removing those who are not like me. We all exist and grow alongside of one another on this little blue ball floating among the heavens simply by God's pure grace.

In here, this church, this congregation like all churches and congregations is also a mixed bag. But in here we know we are blessed with a foretaste of the kingdom of God made up of saints and sinners, good and bad, and yes, wheat and weeds that are both good and evil side by side. Eventually, GOD will evaluate and judge...GOD WILL...we will NOT, nor will we have a say in it! God will sort things...but NOT today. For now, we live and grow, blossom and bear fruit within a messy garden nurtured, watered, and cared for by the grace of Jesus Christ. John Calvin has said that if we look directly at the human race unaided by God, we will feel more hate than love. May the God whom we worship this day never look at us this way!

So today, as our Lord shows us His way, may we walk in the truth; the truth that confesses that we are but sinners whose hearts have been knit to the very heart of God through the blessed promise that is God's only Son Jesus Christ. In our time together here in this age...may our

perspective and our vision be a way to give thanks to God with all our heart and may our praise and thanksgiving to God be found in what we reveal of this promise to all the world. Great is God's love toward us all, wheat and weeds that we have been blessed to live in the tension of this existence knowing that through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit we have been sanctified, delivered from the nethermost pit, and made to shine like the sun in God's glorious kingdom.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen