

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 23 July 2023**  
**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A – Lectionary 16**

**1st Reading: *Isaiah 44:6-8***

**Psalm: *86:11-17***

**2nd Reading: *Romans 8:12-25***

**Gospel: *Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43***

**Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø***

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

Well, I have another confession to make. I know I've admitted to you before that I was never very good at farming, but now I want you to know that on a smaller scale, I've never been very good at gardening, either.

It's a funny thing. Of all the similarities and differences between American and British culture, one difference that we found curious is that in America, most of the people who seem to enjoy gardening, especially flower gardens, are women; whereas in England, it is almost always men who relish gardening and love raising flowers.

But I'm afraid I'm not much help to Coral in the garden. I've tried to help her a little with weeding, but this year especially, with all that we've had on our plate, and now with Coral not being allowed to lift or strain herself for several weeks this summer, our garden has become quite overgrown, as our German family can attest. And then, again, perhaps it is a bit curious that the one job I had on the farm in my youth that involved being in the fields was to "walk beans", to pull the weeds out of the bean fields.

And so, I also find it curious that the farmer in today's parable is himself not very good at weeding. Indeed, he deliberately lets the weeds grow until harvest time. So what is that all about?

Well, today's parable of the weeds is the companion of last week's parable of the sower. These are the only two parables of Jesus for which he offers us a detailed explanation, and they are both here in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. Last week we noted that the farmer seemed to be quite careless with his seeds, tossing them along the path, on the rocks, and into the weeds, not just concentrating on what we would expect to be fertile soil, in the hopes that as many seeds as possible might take root.

This week, this same farmer [who is, of course, Jesus himself] is likewise careless about tending his plants once they have started to grow, allowing weeds to grow up among his good wheat plants, and based on last week's parable, we might well expect those weeds to choke out the good plants. Nevertheless, in today's parable the farmer, Jesus, instructs his workers - that would be us - to let the weeds grow along with the wheat until harvest time, when the angels - not us - will separate the good plants from the bad. So what is Jesus trying to tell us here?

Well, it turns out that these aren't just any old weeds, like the ones I used to pull out of the bean fields, which were obviously not soybeans. The weeds in Jesus' parable are very difficult to distinguish from the good wheat.

I'm reminded of the old gardener at an English Manor house who was retiring. When his young apprentice comes to him and says, "How can you tell the weeds apart from the flowers?", the old gardener responds that "the only foolproof way is to pull them all up by the roots, and the ones that grow back are the weeds". Probably a good thing he was retiring.

Meanwhile, back at Jesus' parable, let me read a description from a good source book I have, the *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*: In Jesus' day "feuding, rival farmers occasionally did sow poisonous plants in one another's fields. The poisonous plants here are darnel [a weedy rye grass with poisonous black seeds - ESV Study Bible], which cannot be distinguished from wheat in the early stages. Once past the early stages, however, the weeds' roots became entwined with those of the wheat. Workers thus could not uproot the darnel without damaging the wheat. Once the wheat was full grown and ready to be harvested, the darnel, now distinguishable from it, could be uprooted and used as cheap fuel," to be burned in the furnace of fire, as Jesus tells us.

So now the parable begins to make a lot more sense. In last week's parable, the farmer's carelessness was due to his desire that everyone should hear God's word, even though some might reject it. In this week's parable, the farmer's carelessness is once again due to his desire that everyone should have a chance for God's word to grow in them to maturity, even though there will be many who refuse to let that happen. And here I am reminded of Saint Peter's words in his second letter: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

So God does not want even the darnel, the false wheat, indeed, the false Christians, to perish, but allows them to continue to be entwined with the true Christians in the hope that they, too, will repent and become true wheat. And who knows who might turn out in the end to be the true wheat, producing the good grain, the good fruit of love toward others? Just as the true wheat produces abundant grains in order to make bread to feed all of us, so true Christians do through their faith and their faithfulness produce good works from the Holy Spirit that are of benefit to others. And in the end, Jesus tells us, that fruit will be evident - BUT, it will be judged by God, not by us.

It is not for us to point to other plants and say: "You are not true wheat." Only God will reveal in the end who is true wheat. So it is not for us to say that because so-and-so does such-and-such, or perhaps does not do such-and-such, he is not a true Christian. Not is it for us to say that this person is not a true Christian because he does not *accept* that person who does such-and-such, or does not do such-and-such. "Judge not, that you be not judged."

It is for us to hear God's word ourselves, and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to others, to be who God wants us to be and to produce the most good fruit that we can. God is generous to all, and if we want to be true wheat in God's field, then we should do the same - give generously to all, regardless of whether they seem to be true wheat or not. In this way, we will, as Jesus says, "shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Amen!

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