

YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

THE HOLY GOSPEL

PENTECOST 5 JULY 17, 2011



The Verse

C. Alleluia.

The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew the Thirteenth Chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

24 Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; **25** but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. **26** So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. **27** And 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?' **28** He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' **29** But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. **30** Let 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.'"

36 Then 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." **37** He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; **38** the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, **39** and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. **40** Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. **41** The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, **42** and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon - July 17, 2011

Year A - The Year of Matthew - Pentecost 5

Isaiah 44:6-8 and Psalm 86:11-17; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

In today's gospel, we find Jesus telling a parable that uses an image to describe the struggle between good and evil. In this parable, good wheat and evil weeds fight it out in a farmer's field.

I have heard it said that the parable of the wheat and the weeds is the same story in any newspaper any of us read. Good and evil fight it out in the world. There is a force that seeks to destroy everything, which promotes hope, peace, and joy. We know its name as Satan, the devil, Beelzebub, Lucifer, or "the evil one." Satan's intent is to destroy what God has created.

Through today's parable, Jesus gives us an illustration of the power of the evil force that can invade every aspect of life. He makes this clear by painting a picture of weeds growing alongside wheat, imitating the good grain and intertwining its roots and growth with what was planted by the farmer, who stands for Christ. How did the weeds get into the field? Jesus says simply that the weeds came from an enemy, the devil, the evil one.

"An enemy of God" is the source of that which works against God. In the service of Holy Baptism, we confess this enemy as "The forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises." We recognize at the very beginning of our life in Christ that we are constantly invaded by the "weeds."

Although we renounce the evil that the weeds represent, we also recognize something else in our baptismal vows. We see that our lives, like the field in the parable, grow with evil intertwined among the grace, love, and godly obedience that we promise to trust and employ in our Christian living. We know from experience that no matter how intent we are to follow God's commandments, we never totally avoid the corruption of thought, word, and deed that go against the commandments of God.

In today's parable, the slaves immediately ask the master whether they should destroy the weeds. That sounds like a natural reaction. After all, what farmer would not want to destroy weeds that grow among a well-planted crop? However, in the parable, Jesus says the farmer insisted the servants wait until time for the harvest. This is because the process of ripping out the weeds will destroy the wheat in the process. We really know this truth. We know that the evil is strongest when it disguises itself as good and confounds us with confusion.

In this parable, Jesus tells us something we really do not want to hear. Jesus is telling us to leave the judging until later, to recognize that throwing the weeds into the fire is God's job, not ours.

We love to point out the evil in others. To do so feels victorious. It feels powerful. We sometimes seem to think God needs our help, when actually, we love being the judge rather than letting God be the judge.

As human beings, we live by the phrase, "Don't just stand there; do something!" However, Jesus uses this parable to turn us in an opposite direction by having the master of the field say, in effect, "Don't just do something, stand there! Let things take their course."

In this parable, Jesus is teaching us to stop seeing and chasing after the bad, and rather concentrate on the good.

The farmer could tolerate the actions of his enemy because he knew he would make it all right in the harvest, gathering the good and destroying the bad. Jesus is saying to us that we can relax in knowing that we do not have to be in the business of judgment or in the business because God himself will make it all come out right in the end.

Therefore, we are left with a teaching that we would do best by paying less attention to the weeds – the evil in life – and simply staying away from it. It is better for us to spend more time tending the wheat – the good in life – fostering its growth and putting it to use as Jesus would have us do, following the values of God's Kingdom.

What Jesus is teaching in this parable is counterintuitive to us as humans. Even to suggest

such an approach is bound to lead to disagreement, if not disbelief. In the conventional wisdom of the world, the teaching of this parable seems impossible. Then, again, there are those words in baptism that we repeat in confirmation. Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises? To which we respond, "I do renounce them." From there, we go on to confess the good, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In baptism, we are called to focus on the wheat rather than the weeds. We are called to focus on what is life and leave the focusing on evil to God. By taking this parable to heart, we can, in the best moments of living out the vows of our baptism and confirmation, look faithfully at the end of Christ's passion story. There, we discover that the power of the Resurrection proves the truth of the parable of the wheat and weeds. In so doing, we will commit ourselves to leaving the weeds to God, and turn all our hearts and souls to nurturing the wheat that God has given us among those people God has placed in the fields that make up our lives. Amen.

Pastor: The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Congregation sings: "Amen"