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“Why? Because God Is Merciful”

Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8:18-27

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week we heard the Parable of the Sower. How graciously, generously, abundantly, and constantly God is sowing the seed of His Word in this world, to build His Church, to produce good plants, believers, who yield a harvest of faith and love. This week we hear that Jesus isn't the only one sowing seed. The devil is too. The seeds of sin and evil in God's good world.

And so there is evil in the world. No surprise there. You know it. It's all around you. The news is full of it. And it seems that not a day goes by where you don't shake your head at all that happens in our world that shouldn't. And the question many are asking is: *why?* Why doesn't God do something about it?

Well, there are two answers that are often given. One is that God doesn't care enough to do anything about it. Or, God doesn't care enough about you to do anything about it. Either He is detached and uninterested, or you are too sinful, too unworthy, for Him to intervene. So obviously, He is not a God you can count on when the going gets tough.

Or, another answer often given - in derision against Christians - is that your God *can't* do anything about it. He wants to, He cares for you, but look at all that is happening! If God *could* do something about it, don't you think He *would*? So your God is not as strong as you think. He is weak.

And even Christians can fall into the trap of thinking these things. When things are going bad, when things are going wrong in our lives, we sometimes wonder whether God really does care about me and what's going on in my life; why He's not doing anything about it. At least that I can see and feel. Or, we give the devil too much credit, thinking him more powerful than he really is and foiling God and His plans. That God is not strong enough to do anything about him. And that's exactly the way the devil wants it, the temptations he plants in our minds. To think too highly of him and to think too lowly of God.

But today, in this parable, God gives us *His* answer to the “why?” question. An answer that is quite different than those we often hear. And quite surprising. And it is this: God allows the evil to stay, He doesn't pull all the weeds now, Jesus says, not because He is weak or uncaring, unable or uninterested, but **because He is merciful**. Which is also what we sang in the Introit this morning: *But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

You see, we think like the servants of the master in the parable. We are the servants of the master in the parable. We want the weeds pulled now and the garden, the world, to be pristine and pure, like it was in the beginning, before sin. So, weeds? Pull 'em out! Get rid of them.

But there are a number of problems with that thinking. The **first** being the assumption that we actually know the difference between the good plants and the weeds. I know that around my house, in my gardens, some plants that I think are weeds are really good plants, and some I thought were good plants were really weeds. So by my judgment, what seems to me, I'd often be pulling the wrong plants. But **God is merciful**. No good plants will be pulled.

A **second** problem is when the weeds and plants are growing so closely together their roots and branches get intertwined. And as Jesus said, uprooting the weeds would uproot the good plants, or hurt them by breaking off good branches. So now think: who are the people in your life who are not believers, not sons of God - do you want them pulled right now? Family, friends, neighbors, people you count on for help, for protection, for what you need. If they were pulled right now, what would that mean for you? No, **God is merciful**. No good plants will be hurt.

Another problem is that while in the world weeds cannot become plants, the same is not true with God. You are an example of that. You were born a weed by nature, but are now a good, fruitful plant, grafted into Christ by baptism and forgiven for your weedy ways. So pull the weeds now? No, **God is merciful**. No weeds will be given up on too soon.

God is merciful. Not wanting any to perish. Which is why Jesus was there telling parables, and why He is here today. That by His Word, by His cross and atonement, by His forgiveness, by His Baptism and Absolution and Supper, He continue to graft weeds into Himself, making good what was evil, and producing a harvest of faith and love. And He is. You and I may not always understand how that is and how certain things that happen in our world are merciful, but we trust not in what we understand or know or feel, but in our God who is merciful. And who showed His great mercy in Christ and His cross. That He would come to be uprooted from this life, that He would die for us weedy sinners, that by His blood we might be good plants in His garden and sons in His kingdom. So if that was His plan from the beginning, and then what He accomplished in time, do you not think He is working that for you now?

There will be a time for harvest - not now, but at *the close of the age*. And we won't be the reapers - that will be His angels. That day has not yet come because **God is merciful**, and patient (2 Peter 3:9). Not wanting any to perish. It is for us now to be who we are, good plants, sons of God, and grow where He has put us, trusting, and growing in faith toward God and love toward one another.

Until that time, Paul says, be like creation and *wait with eager longing* for that day of harvest. When all will be revealed. Maybe the weeds and the evil one are causing you suffering right now, and maybe even your fellow believers who are acting weedy! And when we suffer, when things are going bad, it is easy to get self-absorbed and filled with self-pity. It is easy to focus so much on the here and now, and the problems and pain now, that we cannot see anything else. That we lose hope. And so life can become quite overwhelming.

So take a cue from creation, Paul says. Creation didn't do anything wrong - it was man who sinned. But glorious creation was subjected to bondage and decay and death, and now waits for its Creator to set it free. To restore it, renew it, and recreate it. Perfect again, with no more death, no more weeds, no more evil. Creation is waiting *with eager longing*, he says - like a child up on tip-toes trying to catch a glimpse of the coming parade, or waiting for Christmas morning. The joy is coming, and it can't come quickly enough.

And so too for us. We are subjected to bondage and decay, to suffering and death. Your own sins weighing you down, the sins of others erupting upon you, and the attacks of the evil one relentless in this weedy world.

But **God is merciful!** And so we are not hopeless now, just waiting for the end to come and end our suffering - what kind of life would that be? In that case, why not just end it now and get it over with?

God is merciful. So while all that creation can do is wait with eager longing for the end, our merciful God *has brought the end to us* already, here and now. For He is coming to us already here and now - we don't have to wait for the end. He is coming to us in His Spirit, giving us the joy and beginning the renewal and re-creation of the end *already here* in the midst of the suffering, decay, and death.

And so in **Baptism** *the end comes to you* as you get the end - death - over with, dying with Christ in His and rising grafted onto Christ in a new life. He is the Vine, you are the branches, in this garden, in this new life.

And in the **Lord's Supper** *the end comes to you* as you get a taste of the end, of what is coming, a foretaste of the feast to come - like a great cook giving you a taste of her delights before they are even served. But for you it's even better, for you are not just getting a taste or a preview, but actually already joining in with those who have gone before us, who have been set free, joining in with them already now in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which will have no end.

And in the **Absolution** *the end comes to you* as not only is your weediness forgiven now but you hear the verdict that will be spoken upon you in the end, on the Last Day. All this so that there be no doubt, no question, no fear in your mind about that day, or about your Lord's caring for you, but that you live now - even in the midst of suffering and trouble - not in resignation or despair, but with confidence and joy.

And this breaking in of the end already in the here and now, is what we prayed about earlier in the Collect of the Day. We prayed there, if you remember: *O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit - Your Holy Spirit who comes to us and breaks into our here and now in Your Word and Sacraments - that, ever mindful of - the end - of Your final judgment - or in other words, help us to live not in fear of that day but mindful of the joy and freedom that is coming! - that we may be stirred up to holiness of living here - holiness of living, not giving up - and dwell with You in perfect joy hereafter - perfect joy, for our joy here is not yet perfect.*

And know this too, Paul says, that *the sufferings of this present time*? They're *not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us*.

So do not lose hope in this weedy world, even when the weeds grow tall and plentifully and strong. They will not win. They cannot win. As was said last week: **God will have His harvest**. And that's still true. For Christ is risen and your hope is secure. He has given you His Spirit to be with you now and help you as you wait. As God does His patient, merciful work - for you and for all.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.