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Pentecost 8

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Vienna, VA

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“Deep in the Weeds?”

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.

If Jesus were to tell this parable today, I think He might get accused of being a conspiracy theorist! C’mon, Jesus! Really? An enemy? An enemy came and intentionally sowed weed seeds in your field. Weeds just grow, Jesus! Everywhere! Everybody knows that. You’ve been spending too much time in the Galilean sun. It’s starting to get to you! Lighten up! Don’t be so paranoid.

But Jesus wasn’t being paranoid; this was happening *to Him*. The Pharisees were actively sowing seeds of opposition and doubt wherever He went. They accused Him of being a law breaker. They accused Him of blasphemy. They accused Him of being demon-possessed. They tried asking Him trick questions to discredit Him with the people. They tried to get Him in trouble with the local authorities. And with all this, they didn’t just want to discredit Him or shame Him, they wanted Him GONE. In fact, in the chapter in Matthew right before this one that contains the parable we heard today, we read this verse: *But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him* (Matthew 12:14).

And there are those doing the same thing to the church today. (At least, to the church that remains orthodox and Scriptural and hasn’t caved to the latest cultural fads.) There are those who do not just believe and teach differently than the church and the Scriptures, but who want the church GONE; who want to destroy it. And so, it is said, the church and her teachings - on things like marriage, and sexuality, and the sanctity of life - aren’t just quaint, old fashioned, and irrelevant, to those who now know better, they are evil, dangerous, and violent. These teaching cannot just be ignored any longer; they must be silenced, stopped, destroyed.

But . . . maybe I’m just a conspiracy theorist, too.

And government is not the answer. It isn’t just a matter of getting the right people elected or appointed to guarantee free speech. Because the problem is bigger than that. It transcends countries and governments - it is, as Jesus said, the evil one, sowing his evil seed, seeking to destroy Christ and His church. An effort he began in the Garden with Adam and Eve, through the Old Testament to Jesus in the wilderness, and then through

the New Testament down to our day and age today. And he's not going to stop.

And so these weeds of false teaching, of untruths and half-truths, are still being relentlessly sown today - in schools, in the media, in movies, just about everywhere you look. And not by accident. Intentionally. To counteract the Word of God. That what God calls good, the world call evil. What God says to avoid, the world chases after. What God says is truth, the world says is stupid and foolish *at best*, and hurtful and dangerous *at worst*. And these seeds are growing. Causing even Christians to doubt the truth of God's Word. Christians beginning to themselves ask satan's original question: *Did God really say . . .*

That's how dangerous these weeds are. Weeds sown to choke the good plants of God and the Gospel. Or, to use phrases popular today: to suck all the oxygen out of the church. To dominate the news cycle. That the lie told often enough become the truth.

This is why the **Higher Things** conferences that some of our youth attended this past week and others are attending this coming week are focused on this very thing: **doubt**. *Is this the truth? Can you be sure?* Because satan isn't going to stop sowing and attacking. A tough world is going to stay tough and maybe get tougher. The weeds aren't going away.

That's what Jesus said today. Which maybe sounds counter-intuitive. Because wouldn't it be *better* to just yank all those weeds? That's what the workers in the parable thought. And they were probably very gung-ho about about it! *We'll go pull 'em all up!* But no, the master says. No, Jesus says. . . . Huh? But aren't they hurting the good plants? Yes, but to pull them out would do even more damage. So leave them be. *For now*. And when the time comes for the harvest, then when everything is gathered up, then the separation will take place. But not now. And maybe the workers are disappointed. Maybe we are disappointed. We want an easier life. One without weeds.

But this is the way with Jesus. When, for example, Jesus was teaching His disciples about the cross, Peter said: *No! This shall never happen to you! We'll yank those weeds!* And Jesus rebuked him (Matthew 16:21-23). Another time when people were opposing Jesus, James and John suggested they call fire down from heaven on them! *Yank 'em up!* And Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:53-54). When they came to arrest Jesus and Peter drew his sword to cut down those weeds, Jesus rebuked him (John 18:10-11). Jesus' way is not the easy way. Jesus' way is not to cut down the weeds, but be cut down Himself. Not to avoid the cross but go to the cross. Not to live but to die. Victory by dying.

Now, we're used to hearing that. You're used to *hearing* that. **But you're going to live it, too.** For the evil one and his weeds weren't just after Jesus, they're after you, too. And the victory won't be gained by pulling up the weeds, but by dying. Dying with Jesus. Dying to live. Because the victory isn't ultimately a life here and now, but a life that is

eternal.

This is what Paul was talking about in the reading from Romans today, when he talked about we and all of creation *groaning*, waiting, to be released from our *bondage to decay*. Waiting for the day of the harvest to come. Waiting for when the weeds will finally be separated out and burned. That day *will* come. But until that day, it will be a struggle - for us, for our children, and for their children. The weeds will be plentiful, the weeds will be big, and the weeds will be strong.

But Paul offers words of hope for us, too. He says that as bad as it may get, *the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*. And this, too: *the Spirit helps us in our weakness*. You do not live or fight alone. And *the Spirit is interceding for you*, praying for you, bringing you and your need before your Father in heaven. **So Christians never get lost in the weeds!** If your heavenly Father knows how many hairs are on your head (Matthew 10:30), He also sees and knows each and every good plant growing among the weeds.

So God doesn't just leave you among the weeds and wish you the best! Not pulling the weeds doesn't mean ignoring the good plants. He gives you His Spirit to strengthen you and help you, to grow you among and in spite of the weeds. He waters you in baptism. He lifts you up with His Absolution, His forgiveness. He strengthens you with His Word. And He feeds you with the Body and Blood of Jesus. He doesn't leave the weeds because He doesn't care about you - He leaves the weeds **because He does!** He doesn't want to hurt you in the process. But He's far from a hands off God. He came in the flesh for you, to save you, to provide all you need. And He still is.

So the good news here is not that God is going to pull all the weeds in this world and in your life, but just like we heard last week, that despite all that seeks to hinder the kingdom of God - satan and all his weeds - **there is still a harvest!** Satan will ultimately fail. Jesus rose and so will we. God will have His harvest.

So we prayed in the Collect of the Day earlier: *O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your final judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You in perfect joy hereafter*. Ever mindful of Your final judgment. That is, focusing not on the weeds here and now, but looking to the future, knowing that judgment and salvation are coming . . . Ever mindful of Your final judgment, we be stirred up to holiness of living here and now. Stirred up to holiness of living not because we don't know what's going to happen in the end and so I better be good now! No! **It's the exact opposite of that**. That because I know the end and how it's all going to turn out . . . because I know Jesus' tomb is empty and He is risen from the dead . . . because I hear the verdict that I am forgiven and so not guilty here every Sunday . . . because I am baptized and so a child of God . . . because God has given me His Spirit . . . because feeds me with his own Body and Blood . . . **therefore I can live NOW**. I can

live among the weeds. I do not have to be afraid. The victory has already been won and given to me. The joy we will have is the joy that is already ours, to live now in joyful and loving service to others. *Even* to the weeds and those who persecute us.

Now, you may not be happy about that. Probably won't be. But you can still be joyful. I ran across this explanation of that when preparing for one of our Wednesday night Bible Studies recently. So those of you who attend that have heard this. But I thought it hit the nail on the head, the difference between happiness and joy. It said: **Happiness is determined by what is going on around us. Joy is determined by what is going on inside us.** What's going on around us *is the weeds!* Which doesn't make us very happy. But what's going on inside us is Jesus and His Spirit, which brings us joy. Joy even in the midst of unhappy, challenging, weeds.

So what to do? Stay in the Word. You need His strength. Speak the truth. Sow good seeds. Teach your children. Young tender sprouts are more susceptible to being choked by the weeds. Hear how much God loves you! And not just a little . . . how much He loves you AND how much you need to hear that. Be here faithfully. Hear the Absolution, hear the Gospel, feed on Jesus' Body and Blood, grow in His grace. And be patient. Which is hard! But no matter how many weeds are growing around you, and no matter how strong they look, know that the victory - your victory! - has already been won. The future for the weeds is the fire. Your future is life.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.