

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The disciples of Jesus call this parable that He told the *Parable of the Weeds*. I have a problem with that. Why give the weeds top billing? Why make the parable about them? It's about the good seed; the wheat. Yes, there are weeds mixed in with the wheat, but the weeds are nothing compared to the wheat. The weeds are there, growing up with the good seed. But it's the wheat that will be harvested. The weeds will be gathered up only to be burned. So why call it the parable of the weeds?

That would be like calling a Christian congregation *The Church of the Hypocrites*, rather than St. Paul, St. John, or Christ Lutheran Church. Are there hypocrites mixed in with the saints? Yes, but why focus on them? Like the weeds, they will be gathered in the end to be burned. It's the saints who will be gathered for a harvest and taken up to heaven.

Until that day comes, life here is more difficult for the wheat than for the weeds. And there are a number of reasons for this. Ever since the weed by the name of Cain persecuted his brother Abel, weeds have been a problem for the wheat. The wheat have love for those who are the weeds, but the weeds hate the wheat just as the evil one hates God. "*You will be hated,*" says Jesus to His wheat, "*because of Me.*"

The children of God's kingdom struggle in this life. Not only are the weeds against us; their roots are stronger than ours. The root of a weed, as every gardener knows, is solid and deep. But the roots of the good seeds are fragile. This is why Jesus allows both to grow together. Dig up a weed and ten wheat plants go with it.

So this is our future life here. All causes of sin and all lawbreakers - weeds - are here with us to stay until the Last Day..the day of the harvest. So how can we make it? With the weeds against us, and their roots stronger than ours, how can we fragile wheat plants survive until the harvest?

Well there is this... no farmer plants a solitary wheat plant. He plants a field of wheat, not one seed in his field. Elijah was depressed in the days of the evil queen Jezebel because he believed that he was the only good seed in the field. One solitary wheat plant, he thought, against a world filled with weeds. But it wasn't so. There were seven thousand other wheat plants, said God, besides Elijah.

This is how it is for us. One wheat plant could not survive by itself, but a field of wheat does survive. This is why God puts us into Christian families. This is why He draws us into a congregation. We need each other. We need to be supported by wheat plants around us.

This is more important than we realize. When the weeds around a wheat plant are bearing down on it, it's success or failure depends on whether or not other wheat is there for it to lean on. The weeds are not going away, Jesus tells us. So the burden for the wheat will not be lifted. If we don't have each other to lean on, the weeds will win; we will not survive.

What a blessing, therefore, that we come here to be together regularly. Not just one, but all of us together confess our sins to God. Not just one, but all of our voices together unite to sing hymns

and spiritual songs, to confess the Christian Faith, to pray the Lord's Prayer. When one of us is sick or troubled, that one needs to lean on the rest of us. When one of us is trampled by weeds, becomes broken, and falls to the ground, the rest of us are needed to give support, to help restore the one who has fallen.

It is a big responsibility to be a part of a wheat field. You may think that you do not matter much. You do! Every one of you wheat plants is vital. You are not here in the field by chance. God has placed us next to each other. He knows that we need each other.

And He knows that we need Him. Even an entire field of wheat can be destroyed by a hailstorm, a fire, or a flood. God's wheat is precious to Him. He will not remove the weeds from around us because even one solitary wheat plant could be uprooted in the process. He doesn't just love His wheat field; He loves each and every one of you wheat plants personally.

This really is an amazing thing because we are not worth loving. We act like weeds more than we act like wheat. "*The evil I don't want to do,*" we must say with St. Paul, "*that is what I do! Wretched weed that I am!*" We act like weeds when, rather than giving support, we are a burden to the wheat around us. We act like weeds by ignoring those around us; by forgetting that we are not alone in the field and that others need us.

We act like weeds, but you are not a weed. God did not baptize you for you to be burned with fire in the end. He baptized you for the purpose of gathering you into His barn in the harvest. The way you and I act does not define who we are. Your identity is in Christ. He calls you His dear child, His precious sheep, His little wheat plant. You are wheat not because of how you live, but because of Christ who lives in you and who gave Himself for you.

He is the reason you are wheat. Where does wheat come from? A seed must be buried in the ground. That seed must die. Only then will it produce plants of wheat. Listen to Jesus in John 12: "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" Jesus is that Seed that died. He died for your sake so that you would be, not a weed to be burned, but His precious wheat.

Wheat plants need each other, and we need our Lord. We need His forgiveness for living like weeds. We need His strength because our roots are so fragile. We need His promise that His heavenly barn awaits us. It does, my friend. Jesus will gather all His wheat into His barn. None will be left alone. Until then, He does strengthen you. His words in your ears are taking your roots deeper and making them stronger. And He does forgive you. There is nothing He loves more than forgiving the sins of sinful wheat like us. Not one of you is excluded. Even the weeds He forgives. They just do not believe it. Wheat and weeds, sinners and saints - God declares all justified...forgiven, for Jesus' sake because He died for all. And His wheat believe this, for in them the Holy Spirit is at work.

Our last hymn this morning is no mistake. No, it's not Thanksgiving Day. But how appropriate for us to sing, *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*, our voices united as wheat plants together thanking God for who we are in Christ; for what He has done for us; and what we, as His wheat, look forward to in the harvest. Amen.