

## Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

McDonalds may not be your favorite fast-food restaurant, but you have to admit that it knows how to make money. Its market and research expertise is second to none. Its success rate is impressive. Rarely do you hear of a McDonalds which had to close its doors. And this is largely due to the fact that McDonalds does not just plop its restaurants here and there; its corporate headquarters spends a lot of time and money, a lot of research, finding the absolute best locations to open up new restaurants.

Wendy's, on the other hand, which was the brain-child of Dave Thomas back in 1969, spends very little time or money on such research. Thomas figured out a long time ago that the best place to put a Wendy's restaurant was next to a McDonalds. And that's what he did. He let McDonalds spend all the time and money they wanted to research the best places in America to put up their golden arches. After the McDonalds was up and running, Thomas simply put a Wendy's right next to it.

Now I'm not comparing Dave Thomas and Wendy's in any way to our old Satanic foe, but nonetheless it's true that without even knowing it, Thomas took a page right out of the devil's handbook. Wherever God plants His seeds of the kingdom, right there next to God's seed is where Satan plants his. This does not mean that wherever God builds a Christian church Satan plants a Mormon tabernacle, or a Jehovah's Witness kingdom hall, or a Buddhist temple--although here and there this does happen, even here in Augusta as you know. It does mean that as God is sowing His seed of the Word within you here in His church on Sunday morning, when you leave this place and head for home, from Monday through Saturday Satan, through various means, is sowing within you his faith-killing seeds of lies and wickedness. Jesus' parable is quite clear. The enemy did not sow their weeds in fields of weeds. They waited until wheat seeds were sown in a field and there, next to the wheat, is where they sowed their weeds.

And so here is some advice for us. If we do not want Satan sowing his weeds within our minds, then stop coming to church. Stop coming to where God is at work in you, and Satan will stop his work in you as well. It's true. The devil will not waste his time on you if God is not planting His seeds within you. Why throw weed seeds into a field of weeds? If God's Word and Sacraments are not being sown in you, you will automatically become a field of weeds in time. So the devil will leave you alone and go find a church member who is faithful, and on that member Satan will spend his time and effort. After Saul became the Apostle Paul, the devil would not leave him alone. After Martin Luther understood the truth of Christ in the Scriptures, Satan hounded him relentlessly. Just like Wendy's waited for McDonalds to do all the work, so where God is busy sowing His good seeds, there Satan puts up a workstation.

Last week we were privileged to have Pastor May with us. He is a missionary serving in twenty countries in Africa. In the afternoon what he told me was shocking, but I should have seen it coming. The Lutheran Church is growing tremendously in Africa. Through workers like Pastor May, God is busy sowing His good seeds into that open field. The children, even without catechisms, are learning to recite Luther's Small Catechism by heart, some eagerly coming twice a day to their teacher to listen and then repeat what he says. The children and adults are learning to sing good Lutheran hymns even without hymnals. They listen to their leader and then sing with him or her. God's seeds are erupting in growth all across Africa, and so you know that Satan cannot leave that wheat field alone. Pastor May shared with me how trouble is brewing. The vice-president of the Lutheran Church in one country has been accused of embezzling money from the church and of raping a thirteen-year-old girl. Muslims in many places are constantly persecuting the Lutherans there in Africa. From without

and from within, Satan is sowing his destructive seeds in those very places where God is hard at work. And if you, too, are faithfully coming here where God is hard at work, then expect Satan to be working hard on you as well. But do not despair. "Greater is He who is in you," writes the Apostle John, "than he who is in the world." Satan is powerful, but God's work in you is greater than the devil's work.

One reason why Satan's seeds are so destructive is that, until it's too late, one can hardly tell them apart from God's seeds. Tares and wheat look nearly identical until they mature. Satan's lies are not outrageous so as to be easily spotted by anyone. They are close to the truth, and yet they are lies. On television, in movies, and magazines, and in popular music you and I are often presented with a version of God, but it's not the true God. Their version of Jesus makes Him a good man, an example of love. But in their version He is not the Savior. You see, Satan knows that the Buddhist temple down the road is not going to tempt you. So instead he surrounds you with religious lies from the media, from neighbors, friends, and family which sound similar to the Christian Faith, but they are lies--they are Satan's lies set on destroying God's seed in you.

And Satan knows oh so well how to sow his seeds. In Jesus' parable the enemy sowed their weeds when the men were sleeping. Satan will not attack you from the front where you are expecting it. He attacks from the rear, or from the side, from those places where we are the weakest, at those times when we let down our guard, when we are vulnerable, when we are not in God's Word faithfully, when we are less than regular here in His House and at His Communion Table.

He attacks when we are upset at our spouse or children, or at the pastor or another member. Within our hearts and minds Satan stirs up our emotions. He prods our stubbornness. He urges us to be selfish and unforgiving. And his weeds can quickly overtake the wheat which God has sown.

We need to be in the Word more than we are. The more we are in God's Word, the more we can see what is God's truth and what are Satan's lies. The more we are in the Word, the more prepared we are when Satan attacks. Stand firm in your baptism. Come faithfully to Holy Communion. Through these holy things God is working to sow His seeds in you. Do not give Satan an opportunity. Plant yourself firmly in the Word of Christ.

Like feeble wheat plants which are easily uprooted, God knows that we are weak, and so He is your strength. It's not that we hold on to Him so well; it's that He holds on to you. We do not hold His Word in our hands as firmly and as often as we should. That's why Jesus held tightly to the cross for you, allowing His hands to be pierced with nails. Friends, let us repent and turn away from what Satan is sowing. You have a merciful God. His Son died for you. He allowed Satan to do his worst to Him, so that now in Christ you are safe from the devil. Jesus does not remove Satan's seeds from your field, but He does keep you safe from his seeds.

You are His wheat, and so you are precious to Him. "Do not," He says in the parable, "root up the wheat with the weeds." He loves His wheat, He cherishes it. Even though, in your life and mine, it's often hard to tell us apart from the weeds because we are so sinful. But God knows His wheat. He knows you. And He forgives you. He does not forgive only if you become better and stronger wheat. He forgives you purely out of mercy. Christ did not die for strong, healthy wheat. He died for you and me, for feeble wheat plants who struggle with Satan's seeds, who enjoy living with weeds in our life and often resemble weeds by how we live. God forgives sinners like us. He forgives you.

And that's why you love Him. That's why you love being His field of wheat. That's why you are faithful in coming here where His good seed is sown, where He keeps you safe from Satan's seeds. And that's why you look forward to the harvest, to that great Day when Satan and his evil seeds will be no more, when you, with all of God's wheat, will shine like the sun in the kingdom of Heaven. Amen.