

It is our desire, that as we have gone through these parables and as we continue to do so up until Advent, that you're able to see that Jesus---once explained---meant for us to understand these parables as living examples of divine truths that are very practical. We've looked at parables that address prayer, repentance, and confession.

And this morning it's a parable that comes in the heart of a series of parables. And it is on the one hand telling us about how the kingdom grows and what will be the end of all things on the world's last night when Jesus returns, but [it's also telling us] how do we live between the resurrection of Christ, if one is a believer, and his return. This parable touches on all of that. It touches on the reality of evil right alongside that which is good. And it addresses some of the frustration that many of us feel on a daily basis, perhaps even this morning---and perhaps especially this morning.

But his Word is given to us and we're going to be looking at this Word, which is the parable of the weeds. As I said, it comes in the middle of a series of parables where Jesus is teaching on the nature of the kingdom: how it begins, how it grows, and how it will be finished. He's already taught on the parable of the sower. And here, we learn then, the parable of the weeds, and then he'll move to the parable on the mustard seed and the yeast.

But what happens is you think we're done with the parable of the weeds, but the disciples hear about the parable of the weeds and they hear about the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast, and then they're like.... timeout.... pause.... What in the world did you mean by the parable of the weeds? We don't understand it. Which is why I'm grateful that it's in the Bible, that the disciples who were the closest to him---they're slow in learning. I see a lot of myself in them, and I'm grateful for that. Because if the Bible weren't true, you wouldn't see this kind of stuff. But we see all of it. And Jesus then says, okay, here you go.

So the first part we're going to read is just the parable straight out, without any interpretation. And then the second part, he's going to tell us what it means. And it seems as though Jesus is telling us everything we need we need to know. We got it, and so forth. But unfortunately we're reading English translations of Greek words, and there's also something---there's always more for us and how we apply it. This is an application-driven sermon, so I'm going to try to drive as quickly as I can to that final point, and that is the conclusion: the *telos* and the hope.

But let's begin hearing from God's Word, Matthew 13:24-30, and then 36-43.

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and when away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

"'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,

and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Lord Jesus, by your Holy Spirit, open our eyes that we may see wondrous things in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Perhaps you're like me---you go to the end of your driveway, you pick up a newspaper. Perhaps you turn on your device and you get your news there, or you turn on your television. Many of you have felt what I often feel---that you see many good things that are happening in the world, but then right alongside them, and sometimes it feels like even more so, there is evil going on. We see it, both in the world, [and] we also see it in difficulties in the church. Where today somewhere in the United States there is a church opening its doors for the first time to preach the gospel, but there's another church closing its doors because either it's broken down because of sin, or it just can't pay its bills.

On the week of 9/11, we were gathering together to sign our incorporation papers as a church. On that Tuesday morning my elder and I walked out of the bank where we had the incorporation papers notarized. We were going to have a trustees meeting, and we were having our first worship service just five days later. We got into our cars, and the announcement about two planes hitting the World Trade Center. Simultaneously all around us.

But not just all around us, but also in our own hearts. Maybe you got up this morning and you were praying. It was a good time of prayer. But then the rest of the family got up. And what started off as a perfectly good day, the morning would end---or perhaps maybe it was on Friday, maybe not Sunday---but the morning started off well, but then the next thing you know the morning ends by---you don't know how these children ended up in your home and you hope that they never come back....but they're thinking the same thing of you, I mean... But we also see it in our own hearts. This is what Paul was talking about: When I want to do good, evil is right here by me. It's the frustration. That when good seed goes out, there is also bad seed. In fact, by the way, this text, this idea, is exactly where we get the whole notion of 'He or she is just a bad seed.'

So it has a lot to tell us, so let's look and see. So we're going to look at the text. We're going to look first quickly at the *Three Phases*, verses 24-30, then we're going to look at *The Meaning*, verses 36-43---we're going to take a little bit more time there. Then we'll look at *The Conclusion*.

Let's look together then at the *Three Phases* which Jesus gives us in 24-30. In verse 24 he tells us, using a very agricultural idea, an image which would be very perfect for their time and which should not be all that [unfamiliar] to anybody sitting in this audience, because we live still around a lot of farms here, at least a lot more than I did in metro New York. I get to see this on display all the time. So the farmer comes out and he lays out the seed. He does so, and he does what a good farmer does.

And then as a part of the growing we have [in verses] 25-26 what happens in the growth. What happens in the growth that tells us that in fact the growing happens from the seed, and so we're supposed to, in our mind's eye as an agricultural world, to understand that doesn't happen overnight. It takes time. As the growth happens the wheat starts to grow. It begins to wave in the wind. It begins to form a head, and then the heads open up. And only at that point---it tells us in verses 25-26---but while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came in and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away, but nobody knew that. They didn't know it, it tells us in verse 26, when the wheat sprouted and

formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. So [it was] at some point in the past---distant past---that this bad seed was sown, but it wasn't until the good wheat actually formed heads and opened that they realize, uh oh, we've got ourselves a serious problem.

Then we have the issue of harvesting, it was the third phase. And so, as any good worker would, working for his owner and farmer, he would say, Here's what we need to do. We need to ask, Where did you get that seed? He says, The problem wasn't my seed. They said, Well, who did this? He says, Well, the enemy. Now that may seem foreign to us, but again this was an agricultural society so there was plenty of competition. There were Roman laws that forbade attacking a neighbor's field with bad seed, to demolish or to destroy their field to make it impossible to actually make money.

So, an enemy did this. I had nothing to do with this. So they say, well, here's what we should do. Let's go out and let's remove it. And his answer is exactly opposite of what they expect. And so oftentimes, because these passages are so familiar to us, the surprise is oftentimes missed for us. And that is, he says, 'No. Don't do that. Don't do what seems so obvious.' The problem is, don't do that, because if you do, you're going to do more harm than good. Wait for me. Wait for the harvest time, and I will send out a group of workers that will do this job, do it completely, do it effectively.

You see, the issue is, Jesus is doing and repeating in this parable something which you must wonder is completely infuriating, if not frustrating for the disciples. Because Jesus is talking about the kingdom and his role as something opposite of what they had hoped for. First of all, the kingdom wasn't a massive wave that just came on overnight. It's a seed. It takes time to grow. Jesus comes first as a farmer and not as a general. This was frustrating, even for John the Baptist. You see, John the Baptist, if we were to just stop at his first description of what was getting ready to happen, we would totally understand some of the disciples' frustration. And in Matthew chapter 3, while speaking to the religious leaders, the Jewish religious leaders, this is what John the Baptist says to them. He says, 'You brood of vipers.' Now he lays that out and he backs it up. And he says, 'Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' And that sounds ominous. 'Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Do not think you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children of Abraham.' Reading back into John the Baptist, he says, 'You think you're wheat. Guess what? You're probably not.' And then he says, 'The axe is already at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.' That's ominous language. And then he finalizes by saying, 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork...' now hear this... 'his winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn, burning up the chaff with an unquenchable fire.'

Boom. John the Baptist is saying, Get ready, because it's coming. I mean, there's a part of that, that, you know, we understand it. I mean think about it. You look at the evil in the world, right, and what do we think. When we see evil in the world, many of us, particularly as Americans, when we see injustice, injustice militarily, we imagine the finest military men and women this country can produce, and we're like, yeah, we're going to bring it. We are going to bring it. And how many of you---okay, maybe boys...maybe girls, too, I don't want to presume---how many of you imagine bringing down vengeance on somebody, imagining that you can briiiiing it. Of course that's why we love football.

But that's not what Jesus does. He brings something very different. He brings a kingdom that he likens to a small seed. And he comes as a farmer. So the disciples have a conundrum. They don't understand it. They're like, wait a second. You're equipping us, you're sending us out. Surely you want us to do some damage. We're more than happy to pull up some weeds, because we see them.

So Jesus says, okay, let me explain it to you. So he gives us *The Meaning*. He says first, verse 37, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world." So Jesus says, I am the

Son of Man. I am the sower. The reality is, Jesus is declaring to his disciples, I have come first, not as a general that leads a vast army in to take things over. He's coming in in exactly the upside down, inside out way of doing it. And he says, I've come not with a hammer, but I've come to receive nails from a hammer. That's a complete reworking of all of their expectations. So he says, I've come, I'm the sower. And then he talks as a farmer, as opposed to a fighter.

And then he talks about the seed. He says the good seed is this: it stands for the sons of the kingdom. Well, who is that? The sons---and we can say sons and daughters of the kingdom, the sons and daughters of the kingdom are all, as we have sung about this morning, as Pastor Flora has read--sons and daughters of the kingdom are those who profess Jesus as Savior. And he says that he is taking his children, his sons and daughters, and he is spreading them throughout the world that is the field.

But here's what happens. The problem is there is an enemy, and that enemy is Satan himself, and he sows a different kind of seed. It is an evil seed. And now the word here used for 'seed' literally is referring to a kind of seed called darnel. Darnel looks exactly like wheat. Unfortunately it's not easy to detect. In fact it looks exactly like wheat not just in its growth, it looks like wheat even when it forms its head. It's not until the wheat opens up and the darnel opens up that one realizes that you now have a poisonous weed all over your field.

But imagine that whole issue. So Jesus is telling us something that he wants us to hear. He's saying, okay, the whole idea of growth...the idea of growth is the growth between the weed that is darnel and wheat is indistinguishable. So the reason why you are not to go out into the world where I send you trying to pull up all the evil that you see around you is you can't oftentimes distinguish those who belong to the Lord and those who don't. Our lives and what we see of each other oftentimes is a snapshot freeze frame. And I hope---I don't know about you---that my life is not determined on one, just one, of those freeze frames. And we do not have those eyes to see. And so he cautions us that that is not our job.

This is what Paul was referring to when he was speaking to the Corinthian church, when he was saying your job is not to go out into the world to judge the world, that's the Father's business. In other words, we're not to go out into the world, determine what the weeds and the wheat are, and then just go battling with the hammer or with the sickle or with judgment or condemnation on what we believe are the weeds. Trying to pull it up. It is oh, so tempting.

Can you imagine for just a moment what the workers...if we can look into the parable and give it some life. These men have been asked...this is their job to go out and to bring in the harvest. They don't like leaving a job undone. Knowing that there are weeds in the field they want to take care of it. You want... What is the master thinking? Clearly the disciples were thinking that. Can you explain that to us?

I mean, all I have is a small plot of land. It bothers me---as it did this summer---you know, spring was great with some rain, right? I put down the seed, we got some fertilizer. It was rocking about early June. But then the rain slowed down and stopped. And then one little weed perked up, started talking to another weed, and then these little grubs underneath all of that, they all starting having a concert in my front yard. And before I knew it, there I have the issue. But then here's what I found out. At that point I could see it, but it's hard to remove the bad grass when it's entangled in the good grass. And I just started pulling it. It's frustrating.

Jesus understands this frustration, but here's his answer: He says no. He tells us back in verse 30, you'll remember, "Let both grow together until the harvest." At that time the harvesters will come, we'll hear in the explanation he tells us about the harvest. The harvest is Judgment Day. And then he tells us what he's going to do with his angels---it's the angels that are going to go out and they'll do the

harvesting. But what he tells us about the harvest is, it's coming. It will come, and when it does, it will be done according to the master's wisdom, the master's knowledge. The angels will carry it out, and they will separate the weeds from the wheat. And the weeds are the children of the devil [themselves], who have rejected Christ, who do not think of him or need him or desire him, who suppress the truth of Christ by trying to avoid Jesus by either trying to be good or just doing whatever you feel like. And he says on that day there will be a finishing to that problem, and there will be judgment and there will be eternal condemnation and suffering.

But at the same time, the wheat will be gathered into the barn. And he likens it, he says in verse 43, "Then the righteous will shine the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." So he's saying to all of us in the church and to the world, because God's kingdom includes the church, but it is also much bigger than the church as well. God's sending you out beyond these walls and beyond this fellowship to be used of him. God is on the move. But he's saying there will be a day in which that will all be finished, and I will gather you to myself and you will reflect my glory. Forever.

But the issue is, how in the world are we to apply this? What are we to do with this? I believe there are two things. First, there is a *telos*. The *telos* means there is an end. When Jesus tells us here at the end of this parable that the end is coming, he is foreshadowing exactly what's going to happen on the day which he returns, where Satan will be ultimately crushed and defeated. And not only will all evil and everything that causes sin, but [also] all evildoers will be judged. And it will be done, not according to our imperfect understanding and our imperfect vision, but according to his perfect knowledge and his perfect righteousness, not mine. And we will all bow our knees and confess that he is Christ, but he will judge. And in so doing, he says there will be an end to evil and sin. This will be the finality of what Jesus tells us earlier on at the cross, when he says on the cross, *telestai*, it is finished---meaning you can be righteous, declared righteous, before God in Jesus Christ once and forever. The penalty for sin and the victory over death has been won on the cross and resurrection. It is finished. But the finality of what God is going to do in the world and how he will bring it all together will also have its *telos*, its end.

The issue is, if we know that, then how do we live with hope? How do we live without being overcome with evil and frustration because of what we see? How do we do that? Why, I believe it is here for us in this text. So let's look together one more time. In verse 30 I want you to think about this sentence. He says this in describing to them regarding the harvest. He gives them the instruction. Until that final Day of Judgment comes, he says to them, "Let both grow together until the harvest." At that time I will tell the harvesters what they should do. So his answer is, no, do not go do the harvest, but let it grow. The word there that's being used is this idea, when translated literally, 'permit it.' Suffer the reality that good and evil are active and existing and growing in the world.

But there's something else going on in that phrase which is important for us. Because the hope that we have is in Jesus Christ alone. The hope that we have is in his cross. The hope that we have is the fact that Jesus says it is finished. That instead of bringing the hammer, he received the nails of the hammer, and in that we find hope. But he tells us to wait until the harvest. Is the answer merely to be patient?

But how do we be patient? I believe it's here for us in that same phrase where it says, 'Let both grow together until the harvest.' That word, 'let both grow together,' that same phrase finds in the verb a same family of verbs that has two meanings in the New Testament. The first meaning is what we use here: permit it, allow it, suffer it to grow. But it has also another meaning, because when taken out of the agricultural arena and brought into one of financial arena, that same word that means permit or suffer to grow means to forgive a debt. Jesus tells us here we are not called---those who are believers---to go out into the world and to tear up to the weeds, because we'll mess up the wheat. So then how are we to live? How are we to live is this: by permitting and letting it grow, we're gaining patience. How are we gaining patience? Because at the center of our faith is not only a Savior who

said, it is finished, it is one who tells us it is finished for us. We need forgiveness. We are the ones whose debt has been paid in full.

So how do I connect it to all of this? Well, there's a prayer at the center of Jesus's teaching in regard to prayer, and I'd like to recite it together as a congregation this morning. It is the Lord's prayer. Let's pray this together. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

At the center of our faith is a prayer that says, Father, forgive me my debts, because we pray to one whose Son suffered our evil. At the center of our faith is a Savior who suffered the ultimate injustice. The ultimate judgment which was due to us, he took on himself. So how are we to live until he returns again? We live as those who have been forgiven, and who, when faced with persecution, faced with evil, faced with enemies, not only on the outside, but in our own hearts, and sometimes in our own families---how are we to respond? Forgive our debtors as we are forgiven. For you will deliver us from evil. The promise and the hope is that just as it was finished on the cross, it will be finished at his return. It's not just that evil will be judged, but that it will be completely and utterly undone. The world will be made new. And all in justice will be judged, but then justice will be established in its place. And we, who find the invitation to the kingdom winsome and we are drawn into that kingdom to profess faith in Jesus Christ, will reflect the glory and the golden nature of his goodness for all eternity and enjoy him forever and ever feast with him---not up there in the stratosphere, but on a new earth where no more dandelion, no more bad seed, no more evil will be known.

He is coming again to deliver us, ultimately and forever, from evil. But until that day, Lord, how do we live? Is the answer that we call down epithets and judgment on our enemies? Is it that we pick up the sword or the gun to do justice that seems right to us? Do I give up on those who seem so far from the kingdom---but shocker upon shocker, from all eternity those who seem farthest from the kingdom are those who are perhaps sometimes the closest. I know that the Bible tells me that the heart is deceitful above all things, that I can rationalize my sin away. If I can rationalize my sin away, who makes me judge? The Lord who is righteous, who is truth, who is full of glory and awesome power and wrath---he is the one to whom I must lay down my weapons and say, Lord, forgive me my debts as I forgive my debtors. And you will deliver us from evil.

He tells us, 'No.' He tells us to wait. But telling you to just be patient, there is no power in that. I want to direct you and direct my own heart back to the only source of patience. A suffering, victorious savior who has forgiven us our sins, that we would even be willing by that same grace to forgive even our enemies. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but it is a spiritual battle, and our savior will do it. Amen? It's hard to pray when we're full of frustration, but prayer is what we are called to do. Lord, help us. Help us by your grace. Bring your kingdom to fruition once and forever.

But I say this to you in closing: All who have ears, let them hear. At this moment in which I speak, it is not the *telos*, which means the kingdom is open to all. Come to him and know his grace and know his forgiveness, and you will know life eternal.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, come again soon and quickly. Come, oh Lord, and make all things right. But until you do, may all those who call upon you have the grace to suffer, because that can only come from you, who has suffered in our place. But Lord, we pray, bring us to that end, and give us hope today---hope for our own hearts, our own families, our neighborhoods, and the world. May your kingdom grow, and may you gather your wheat. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.