

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
July 20, 2008

Wheat and Tares

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon comes from the Gospel, which was read earlier.

Everyone loves a good story. Some stories make us cry, while some stories make us laugh. Some stories are for fun, while some stories try to make a point. Jesus was one who told lots of stories. However, his stories were more than just mere stories; they were parables, stories with a teaching moment to them. Jesus told 36 parables, and 7 of them occur in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Nearly every one of the parables uses nature as the key framework of the story. Each parable deals with an ultimate truth and teaching of Jesus. The parable of the wheat and the weeds is no exception.

So the Church begins. As Jesus described it in the Parable of the Sower last week, He does so again as this new parable begins. He describes a man who sows seed in His field, and thus He has come and spread His Word of grace throughout this world in order to raise up His holy people. But the joy is quickly interrupted in this new parable.

The enemy of God introduces foreign elements, namely the tares or weeds, and these are sown by the enemy of God, the devil. God has enemies and they are actively engaged in overcoming His kingdom and spoiling God's rightful harvest, but God permits this action only so He might be able to save His own at the final harvest. This parable of Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven in its earthly estate is a blend or mixture of good and evil, true and false, wheat and tares.

The devil is a clever enemy, and we dare not dismiss his cunning. Throughout history, he has used persecution and violence against the Lord's Church in order to destroy it, but this has never accomplished his goal; indeed, a famous saying is that "*the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,*" because the witness of persecuted Christians has usually strengthened resolve and won converts. This does not deter the evil one, however; instead, he resorts to a far more insidious plan. He creates a false church and intermingles it with Jesus' true Church. He raises up unbelievers who claim to be Christian, but do not follow the Lord and His Word. This has a few effects: for one thing, many will join a false church and then believe that they are truly Christians because they do what that church teaches, even though it rejects Scripture. For another, it casts Jesus and His people into disrepute. Unbelievers see a group committing sins in the name of Jesus, and conclude that all Christians are so hypocritical—perhaps in need of control and legislation, even prosecution.

Having finished his explanation of why He spoke in parables and of what the parable of the sower meant, Jesus continued to feed the people with the Word. Through the gospel promises of God's Word and Sacraments, Jesus gives us the sure hope of heaven. To explain one aspect of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus points us to the familiar world of farming. This farmer owned his own field and therefore made extra sure that the seed he planted was good seed. He wanted good seed that would germinate and produce wheat, not weeds.

That sounds exactly what we heard in the Gospel last week. We want to be good seed, producing wheat, just as we want to be good soil. We don't want weeds ruining our

harvest of wheat, just as we don't want bad soil hindering the growth potential of the good soil.

Good seed was planted in the Garden of Eden. God created man and man was good. He had planted and sowed the good seed, spreading His Word to Adam and Eve. They were yielding the wheat which God had planted, for all of humankind. Yet as we all know, Adam and Eve did not continue to yield the wheat which God had planted. Satan, God's enemy, entered into the Garden and began to sow weeds among the wheat. Satan's weeds, sin, has entered the field of God's wheat and is now intermixed with the wheat.

The weeds that are among the wheat are not just any weeds. They are a type of darnel, a weed that closely resembles wheat, except that the grains are black. On a far observation, they look just like the good grain; however, it is only on close inspection that you see that it is not just wheat, but it is weeds among the wheat.

That, my friends, is the same for us as well. We are God's wheat, planted with His Word and Spirit, in the rich soil that is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet in each and every one of us, there are weeds, there is sin. This will remain until the harvest. When is the harvest: it is at *"the close of the age."* When Christ comes again, the wheat will be separated from the weeds. So it will be with us. When Christ comes again, Christians will be separated from the non-Christians; believers from the non-believers; the true Church from the false church.

We all know the true Church: where the *"Gospel is preached purely and the Sacraments are administered rightly."* The true Church is where we hear the Word of God, in both its Law and Gospel, showing us our sins and showing to us the forgiveness

given to us in Christ. The true Church is where a sin is called a sin, according to the Word of God. Do not misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not saying that the Lutheran Church is the only true Church on earth. There are other denominations and church bodies that have the Gospel. With that said, there is indeed the false church.

What do I mean by the false church? I mean that church body or denomination that takes sins condemned in the Word of God and make them permissible because "it applied 2000 years ago, it doesn't apply to us now." We see that with state churches that prohibit pastors on preaching against sins such as homosexuality or abortion because they are permissible under state law. How can the true Church be found if the Gospel is not preached purely? How can the true Church be found if a sin according to God is no longer a sin according to man?

The tares are going to be around until the harvest. False believers, claiming the name and blessing of Jesus, are going to be around until the Last Day. To the eyes of many, they will look like a good, helpful, productive crop. It's not going to be different or better before then. In fact, from Matthew 24 and elsewhere, it is clear that the weeds will nearly choke out the wheat. It is prophesied that true Christianity will be nearly snuffed out before the Lord returns in glory. It is not pleasant news, but it is good to be prepared. There are many who believe that the Church will only grow greater and more glorious on earth as it triumphantly prepares the way for Jesus, but this is not what the Scriptures say. Those who believe it to be so are priming themselves to be bitterly disappointed and perhaps led astray.

Here's the encouragement: the Lord's harvest will remain, and the harvest day will come. While the Church will be buffeted and battered, the gates of hell will not

prevail against it, and the Lord will return on the Last Day to deliver His people to heaven. It is then, when the harvest is gathered, that tares and wheat will be seen by all for what they really are. Those who gloried in sin and claimed Jesus' name will confess, "Jesus is Lord, but I am not among His redeemed." Those who remained in the faith will rejoice, "Jesus is Lord, and we are delivered." Do not despair: the harvest is coming. In this wilderness of the world, the Lord has prepared a place for you. He has made you His own, borne you again, by the waters of Holy Baptism. He has nourished you with His Word and nourishes and strengthens your faith with His very body and blood. To that end, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes on the Last Day, do not fear about the tares amongst the wheat: He will gather His children and bring them to His Father, to live in everlasting righteousness, because Christ Himself has sifted the wheat from the tares. All that will remain are those who have been bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. In His name, amen. Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus until life everlasting, amen.