

A Harvest and Healing
Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43

July 23, 2023
All Saints Lutheran Church

Today we hear a second gospel about a sower and some seed.

You'll remember last week the parable of a sower who threw seed everywhere. Remember, the parable is about the sower, not the seed, not the various kinds of soil – whether path, rocks, weeds or good soil. The sower was sowing life. The sower had such a passion for life that life would be scattered everywhere – everywhere there was a chance that life might take root, no matter how brief a time.

Today we have a sower sowing good seed. And the seeds took root; plants emerged. But something was wrong! It looked like there were weeds; there were other plants amid the wheat. How did that happen? Was there something wrong with the seeds? This was odd and the slaves made quick inquiry.

“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?”

The householder replied that an enemy had done this. Someone wanted to interfere with the crop; reduce the yield; spoil the harvest.

“Well, then,” the slaves inquired enthusiastically, “do you want us to rip them out?”

Surprisingly – remember, there is usually a surprise in a parable – something unexpected- Surprisingly the householder said, “No, don't rip out the weeds. You might do damage to the wheat the crop. First, you might trample on them as you work through the field. You might pull up the wheat by the roots as you dug at the weeds. And frankly, you might mistake one for the other and we lose even more.”

I understand that there is a type of weed that looks very much like wheat. Matthew uses a Greek word, *zizania*, which is a type of wild rice grass. He probably meant to say *darnel*, which is a common noxious weed closely resembling wheat and it is everywhere in Israel. You really can't tell the difference until the plants mature and head out. The heads of wheat are heavy and droop. The heads of darnel are light, empty, and stand straight up.

So, the householder is suggesting that the weeds and wheat grow together until maturity, when the full reality will be obvious. But even at that, the householder will not leave the task of harvest to the slaves. The harvest will be performed by gleaners – with specific instructions and the wisdom of angels.

Wait, the householder said. Until the right time. Until the time of harvest.

Weeds and wheat must grow together. It seems a bit odd, No? Maybe not wise? Maybe not the best judgement?

But that's getting to the point. The slaves were not in a position to determine weeds from wheat. So they must grow together until the difference becomes obvious.

Good and evil growing together. Good and evil abiding in the same field, the same community, competing to thrive.

Why do tyrants, connen, bullies and dictators seem to thrive, while gentle folx, decent folx, honest and caring folx work so hard and often gain so little? It's not fair! It's not what we would do!

Maybe it's a good thing you and I are not the householder and really do not – ought not – make those decisions.

Why is there evil in the world? Why doesn't God do something? Why not intervene sooner?

Well, we only have a partial answer. Evil is not the failure of the wheat. It is not something fundamentally wrong with the seed. The poor do not deserve to be poor. The innocent are usually innocent. Or most often so.

Jesus says plainly that the field is the world, and the wheat are the children of God. Children of God. Made in God's image. Born of the soil – and of the Spirit.

This seems to be a discomfoting simplistic dualism. There are good people and bad people. This seems to say. But we know that's not true. Even good people have limitations, failings, biases. Good people promise to come through but disappoint us. Good people make sincere commitments, but then get distracted. Good people can be kind – but also impatient. They can be disinterested. They can be unavailable.

We would like to be able to choose clearly and effectively. This is the best teacher – the best candidate – the best employee. Even the best friend – the best spouse. But even the best let us down; they are not perfect. But they are not evil either.

Bring this perspective to the climate crisis...

We have certainly enjoyed and depended upon the benefits of carbon-based fuels. We can just hop in the car and go. All the convenience of our own vehicles. No extra time lost in transit schedules and transfers.

We flick a switch and either heat our homes or cool them; prepare meals; and have light when and where we need it.

We enjoy the convenience of plastic packaging. Cucumbers and hardware, toothpaste and detergent safely contained in plastic. Need a meal to dash and go? Got it!

In the summer time we can go on holidays to the cabin, relax at the beach, camp in the mountains or visit family across the provinces.

Is gasoline evil? Are those who drill it, refine it, sell it, manufacture or maintain our vehicles evil?

Is plastic evil? Are holidays evil?

We have to be more aware of the consequences of our choices. We must make more difficult choices. What we drive and how and when we drive. Choices about what we buy and how it's packaged and manufactured. And who are the people behind our purchases? Who works the farms? Who works the mines and the factories? How are they paid? How much say to they have in their labors and their futures?

Should we rip out the weeds? It's not so easy. Weeds and wheat grow together. Wheat must grow to the fulness of its purpose in the passage of time. And the same can be said for our forests, our rivers, our wetlands, all of the elements and the creatures within them.

There are potential benefits and potential risks in everything we encounter in our environment – and that means everything. It's not enough to be good enough for you or good enough for me. We must consider what is good for all – and that includes those who come after us. They say to the seventh generation.

Are we experiencing climate change ourselves? Some say no, not yet. So, it's not a problem. Others though are moved enough by the news of the homeless and the flooded and the burned out and the starving and the sick. Others close to home are tasting the smoke, dying of extreme heat, losing their jobs.

Advantages, opportunities and freedoms are not as simple as “grow where you are planted.”

Should we rip out the weeds? It almost seems to be uncaring of God to allow weeds and wheat to live together for any more time than this. When will come the harvest? How much longer do we have? How little time is there before what is undesirable or inconvenient becomes necessary, becomes urgent, becomes catastrophic?

Those are strong words. We don't like those words. And most of us who react strongly to those words react because we still enjoy the advantages and conveniences- honestly – perhaps - even thrive on the injustices.

This is a simple story about complex realities with complex consequences to problems we may not even agree are yet problems.

This simple story does not give all the details to solutions. It names the truth that good and evil exist together. There is benefit with responsibility. There is opportunity with bias and prejudice.

Good people make bad decisions. Friends sometimes align themselves with power to benefit one another rather than the common good. Alliances form policies and structures and loopholes and misinformation to ensure that some gain while others lose.

And alliances point one way and the other calling each other names and labelling each other as liars and each saying about the other. “They are the weeds. Get rid of them!”

Jesus says we need to live together. He also says that there will come a time. But rather than focus on slashing and burning and ripping and trampling, how do we make the most of the time we are given...?

To live for and work toward and commit to what is just rather than unjust? We must seek compassion rather than competition. We must put our effort into bridge building more than empire building.

That's not going to happen until the wheat says about the weeds – “we depend on one another.” And the weeds say about the wheat “we need one another.”

This takes some wisdom. And the involvement of angels rather than slaves.

We must limit rash reactivity – especially violence.

We must look for the informed, wise, creative and just agents who will address evil, injustice, imbalance and exploitation – all that Jesus called the causes of sin and evil-doing.

There are stories told in the Bible about judgement with violence, destruction and blood-shed. Those stories are told sometimes by people in power who want to scare and intimidate others into compliance and submission. “Woe to you!”

On the other hand. Those stories are also told by those who experience powerlessness and seek revolution and deliverance from their oppression with vengeance and retribution. “God’s gonna trouble the water!”

Lies, conspiracy, controversy, blame, guilt, weeping and grinding of teeth are vile elements of stories from both sides.

But they are not the only stories of the end of time and new beginnings.

There are stories of strangers becoming friends. A uniting humanity under a common divinity. A kindom, not a kingdom – where the poor are looked after, the homeless find welcome, the sick are made well. And the hungry are fed.

There are new cities, sustainable cities, cities of beauty and purpose and healing.

We have one story today about weeds and wheat. But there is another story about a tree of life and the leaves of which provide healing for all that is broken and suffering.

We don’t need fire and brimstone. As the polar caps melt and oceans and rivers flood, we don’t need fire and brimstone! Wisdom, yes. Change, absolutely. Judgement that is more about discernment than discrimination, empowering more than condemning.

Weeds and wheat right now are growing together. Let’s wait for healing. Let’s work for healing. Let’s share with one another in healing.

And let there be a harvest of peace, justice, mercy, truth, honor, humor, and beauty. Let this harvest fill our hearts and our barns and our homes.

Until then, we must find ways to live together – live and grow and thrive. Not merely exist. Certainly not die. Certainly not suffer.

Harvest is coming! Let it be beautiful. Let it be alive!

One after thought.... Remember, I said there is always a surprise, and irony, a bit of humor in Jesus’ parables?

Monocultures do not thrive. Monocultures are not sustainable. Growing one crop doesn’t work. It depletes the soil. It unbalances the economy. The fisherfolk around Jesus who had to pay a tax on all that they caught – oh, yes, it’s true – there is nothing new under the sun – the fisherfolk might not have gotten the joke. But the farmers at Jesus’ feet probably did.

You see, ever since the first testament prophets, farmers were losing their farms to large householders and corporations and public taxation!

Monoculture, growing olives and wheat and grapes, an economy based on “grain and wine and oil,” meant profits going elsewhere – not staying on the farm. It was true of the empires under corrupt governments in Israel. It was true in Babylon and Assyria. It was true under Rome.

The farmer, the local guy, the laborer, always lost out if the emphasis was on “grain and wine and oil.” A phrase used by the prophets as both a blessing and a curse...

Waiting for a universal crop is no promise to me. Wheat will make me sick. Waiting for a universal crop of corn would mean death to my wife.

Remember these are parables – simple stories with simple lessons for complex realities.

Let the wheat and “the rice grass” grow together... Rice grass... quinoa? Teff? Sorghum. White rice. Brown rice. Arrowroot. Tapioca. See, fundamentally, since the beginning of time, The Creator God has had a preference for diversity. The world evolves and thrives under diversity. Look at the trees, flowers, furred-finned-and flight creatures.

Look at the insects. It is said that cockroaches will be the last species to die on this planet!

As long as we take time to diversify, we have a hope of survival!

I can usually tell the difference between wheat and barley, between canola and peas, between carrots and yams. But I would probably die if I had to forage in the bush. I need someone – with the wisdom of angels to say... “These weeds are medicine. They have healed my people for thousands of years.”

What seems unfair under God may in fact be most gracious. We have time to change – to transform – to be healed.

Perhaps that is wonderful judgement! Amen.