

Walking the Way of Jesus

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Would you please join me in prayer? *Heavenly Father, today we come before you as people who are humbled by your grace, that you are our king, that you have resurrected your son, and he resurrects us daily. Lord, we give you thanks for that and made this word sink into our hearts deeply. We pray it all in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Amen. So I have a couple of things to share with you, and I think that the first one is that sometimes I am wrong. This is not a surprise to people who know me. But also the other thing I want to share with you is that my mother-in-law was very much right. So we're talking about a parable today, and the parables are ways for Jesus to tell earthly stories with a heavenly meaning.

Remember that, have you heard that before? Maybe Sunday school or confirmation Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. And in this particular parable, Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." Now, can you tell me where the kingdom of heaven is? Where's the kingdom of heaven? There are some points up high, and there are some people say all around here. So which one is right? Is it far away from us with God because Jesus is at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, or is it here among us? Which one? Thank you. It's both. Right? They're both true. They're both real. The Kingdom of God is where God is, where in the heavenly realm with Jesus seated at His right hand. But it's also right here, where He has promised to be through the power of His Spirit. He is present, right? He is with us. So, what are parables really all about? They're about helping us see the world differently because the kingdom of heaven is right here.

So it was hard for me to see when 20 years ago I was invited to go with Erin, my wife. We were just married, and we went to my in-law's house in Missouri. And we were invited to go on a float trip with their family.

Do you know what a float trip is? They do this, in Missouri, we have rivers, and you spend the entire day on the river. You get your picnic lunch and the coolers, and you get in kayaks or wraps or canoes, and you spend the whole day on the river. And so we got ready in the morning, and I knew exactly what to do. We got our lunch packed, and everything ready to go. And of course, what's the one thing you do before you go out into the sun for the whole day? You put on sunscreen. So guess what I did. I put on sunscreen. I put on a lot of sunscreen. I put on so much sunscreen, I thought, "Well, I'll be okay." And I was . . . for a while.

We get out to the river. We have a great morning. It's a lot of fun. We stop for lunch. We eat lunch. And at that point, my mother-in-law says, "Hey John, would you like to put on some more sunscreen?" And I say, "No, no. I put on a ton of sunscreen just a few hours ago. I'll be just fine."

You can see where this is headed. Right? We had a big day the next day. All family and friends were coming over, and I'm not sure I could actually tell you any of the details of that day. Because all I remember is how terribly bad my sunburnt back felt. The pins and the needles and the burn was just, oh, it was, it was terrible. It was so bad.

I learned my lesson that, on many flow trips since, I always reapplied sunscreen. But on that day, I couldn't see what was going to happen just a few hours ahead of me. I thought I knew the answer. I thought I knew how to manage life. I thought I knew how to manage myself.

But I couldn't see even though I was told by somebody much wiser than myself.

In our parable today, the disciples and the servants of the master have the same issue. They can't see well. They think they know what's happening. They think they can understand, but they don't see well. So Jesus says in this parable, "The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in the field."

And as we heard earlier, the good seed was sown and the evil one came in and sowed the bad seed. And there was wheat, and there were weeds, and they grew up together. That's the crazy thing. They grew up together. Almost indistinguishable, hard to tell one from the other, but the master servants came and said, "Hey, there's wheat, and there are weeds. How did this happen?" The servants sound almost kind of rude to the master. "Did you not know what you were doing? How are there weeds here?" The master then, as is typically the way in these parables, surprises the servants. Because they say, "Hey, we can see the weeds. Why don't you just let us take those out so the wheat can grow?" Well, because you all know in your gardens you need to weed them because the weeds take up valuable nutrients for the plants you're trying to grow. That's fine. They know this. They are smart. They know how the world works. They can see how this is going to go. And the master surprises them and says, "No, do not pull the weeds out. Let them grow together. And when it is time, at just the right time, I will take care of it." That's what the master says to the servants: "At just the right time, I will take care of it." Now, if this is a parable about the kingdom of heaven, which is right here with us, what is this saying to us today? If we are followers of Jesus, followers that are servants of this Master, what does this mean for us?

Well, one of the things that it means right away is that we are people who don't see very well. We just don't see very well. And one of the professors that I had at the seminary wrote this vintage commentary on Matthew, Dr. Jeff Gibbs, and this is how he put it in his commentary. He said, "Look, the world and the church looked the same to us, and this is what it looks like. The people look confused, they're confusing, and they're flawed." Now notice I said those people "they". "They" are confused. "They" are confusing to me. And "they" are flawed. Now, all right. We know where this is going, right? It's not just them, but it's also me and you. This is why in this strange in-between time, where the kingdom of heaven is right here on Earth but you just can't see the fullness of it, we look kind of the same: we're all just a bit confused; we're confusing to other people; and we're flawed. There's good news in this though because the Master knows this about us. He knows our hearts. He knows our minds. He knows exactly how this plays out in this world. And so what He does, by telling the servants not to separate the wheat and the weeds on their own understanding, He reminds them that it is not their job to be the ones who make everything right in this world. It's not their job to purify the world. It's not their job to make everything new. So whose job is it? This is the Master's job. Exactly. This is the Master's joy to be here with us, to show us His way, and to promise us that at the end He is going to make everything new.

You see, He looks at us and sees our imperfections. Absolutely. He sees our flaws; He sees our brokenness, and in the middle of that, He decided to send Jesus. And Jesus looked at us and all of His disciples around Him and saw their imperfections and their flaws and how confused they were, and He chose to walk the Way of the Cross.

And three days later, when He rose from the dead, when He was that Resurrected King who was resurrecting us, He said you can be free

from worrying about purifying the world and being the judge and doing all the things the Master does because the Master will take care of it. Because He has made good on His promise to love us and to bring us close to Him.

This is the new life that we live today. It's a life that has lived in freedom. We are free, because of Jesus, from worrying about how good of a Christian we are, and from showing everybody how good of a Christian we are. Have you ever been around people who just want to make sure that you know how good of a Christian they are? Okay, let's point the fingers back this way a little bit sometimes, right? It's not just them, it's us too. We have this temptation. But if we trust in the Master to do that separating on His own time in His own way, we are free from that. We are also free from the worry that we have about our salvation.

When Jesus says you are mine in your baptism, He means it and He is not going to go back on that. You are with Him from now throughout all of eternity. The kingdom of heaven that exists right here, right now, carries right on into eternity, and you, just as His child right now, will continue to be His child.

And finally maybe more poignant for us, is that when we trust that the Master is taking care of this in His own time in His own way, it frees us from being afraid of failing. It doesn't free us from failure, right? There are ways that we are going to fail our brokenness, our flaws, absolutely. But we don't have to be afraid to fail.

I don't know. I've been a pastor for a long time and I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say to me, "Well my husband, my brother, my family member, my coworker, whatever, I could sense they wanted to talk about their spirituality, talk about God, and I just

didn't know what to say. So I didn't say anything because I was afraid.”

When we trust that God has this all under control, that in His own time He's going to separate, He's going to do His thing, we do not need to be afraid of saying the right things. The Spirit is with us. He will take care of it. We simply need to walk and follow. So Jesus sets us free from all these things that would push the Master aside, that would cause us to feel like we would need to be the deciders, the ones who take care of the world when we settle in that freedom.

When we rest in the freedom Jesus gives us, it changes our lives. There are three things today that I think are important for us to remember this week as we go into living that way with Jesus. The first one is this. It's that you are meant to be where you are. You are placed here for a reason. There's a purpose in your placement.

Now, this is what people have been telling me for the last three or four weeks. Pastor John, we're so happy that you're here. You know, we're happy that you're moving to this area. We're happy that your family's coming and, and we too feel very confirmed by that. We're encouraged by that. We feel that God has called us here for this reason.

We're here for a reason, but I want to reflect that straight back to you. Because as I have talked with many of you I see that you are here for a reason. You've been put in this community within the places that you work, within the schools that your kids go to, and the ways that you serve for a specific purpose when you're not afraid to be who Jesus called you to be, to talk about him. You are able to change people's lives around you. God has put you right here right now for a reason.

The second way that this changes our lives is that we start to see people as people. That sounds kind of redundant, right? But do you know what I mean? Sometimes we have a tendency to see people as “other”, as “other than”, or as “different from”.

But what God says to us by saying the wheat and the weed are all going to grow up together, and the way that you see the world isn't always quite right, just like I wasn't always quite right about my sunscreen application. People are people. The Lord is the one who sows the seed in the field. He's the one who has created all of these wonderful human beings around us.

He's the one who has loved each and every one of them that He sent His Son to die and rise for them. And so, as people who follow Him, who walk His way, guess what that means? That means that they are worthy of our love as well. When we see people, as God sees them, it changes the way that we go about our daily life.

The final thing that I want to put before you is this: when we are free in the gospel of Jesus, we are free to walk His Way. We're free to walk the Way of Jesus. We're free to remain close to Him, to learn from Him together too. We're free to fail. And know that when we confess our failure, guess what's going to happen every single time. Do you know you're going to be forgiven? Now, we don't live with the excuse of that and just keep doing what we're doing. We learn from it. We don't keep not applying sunscreen at lunchtime on those flow trips. We learn. We grow. We walk with Jesus. His promise to us is that as far as we feel from Jesus sometimes in our life, He is actually right there with us, that He is walking with us, showing us the Way.

So these three things are what I want you to take with you this week: remember that you are placed here for a purpose; that you are free to

see people as God sees them; and you are invited and called to walk the Way of Jesus. In all of these things, I've seen this really coalesce over the last couple of weeks being here with you, with the staff at our church and school, with the dinners I've had at people's homes, and the meetings I've had and the times I've been able to meet all of you, I can see that we are ready to walk the Way of Jesus together. This is what Our Savior's Way is all about. We are all about engaging and inviting people. And who are these people? They're confused, they're confusing, and they're flawed. And they're us, and they're our neighbors and our friends. We are all about inviting them into this together with us as we walk the way of Jesus together.

This is our calling. This is who we are. This is what we do.

Would you close in prayer with me? *Heavenly Father, You've called us to be Your children. You've given us life through Your Son Jesus, and You ask us to simply follow You. We ask, Lord, that You would allow us to find purpose in right where we are and our placement, that we would see the people around us as people that are greatly loved by You and need love from us, and allow us to remain close with You knowing that we are never alone and always loved as we walk the Way of Jesus together. We pray it all in His name. Amen.*