

We Are Planted to Bear Good Fruit

July 19, 2020

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Rev. Dr. Eric Peterson

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

We all have questions about faith. We all look at life and wonder at times about the things of God. *"If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world?"* Or, *"If God is all powerful why doesn't he get rid of the evil?"* I am sure you have your own questions. The good news is that God answers our questions in His Word.

Today's Gospel is a parable about an owner of a field, who personally planted good seed in his field with the intention of producing a rich harvest of wheat. But an enemy came under the cover of night and planted darnel seeds into his field. Darnel is a weed that looks like wheat when it is growing but has a toxic fruit when it matures. When the owner's servants saw his field filled with weeds, they were appalled. ***"Sir didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did all these weeds come from?"*** The owner replied, ***"An enemy did this."*** The servants wanted to help so they asked, ***"Do you want us to pull up all the weeds?"*** And the owner replied, ***"No, if you pull up the weeds you may root up the wheat with them. Let the wheat and the weeds grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to collect the weeds and bundle them to be burned, and then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."***

Fortunately for us, Jesus explained this parable to his disciples. ***"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."*** (Matthew 13:37-39)

So what did we learn? First, God owns the field, just like he owns the world and everything in it. Second, God puts only good into the

world. Third, the seeds the owner plants are those who believe in Christ. God plants people of faith into the world to produce a harvest of blessing for the Lord. Fourth, the work God has given those who believe in Christ will not be easy because the devil plants people into our lives who pull us away from God and discourages our faith. The devil desires to destroy God's harvest. But in the end, there will be judgment and God's goodness will prevail.

Every day our faith is being tested. People are either pulling us away from God or pulling us toward God. There is no neutral ground and none of us are exempt. Let me share two examples of how people can be used to distract us from doing the will of God. The first example happened between Peter and Jesus right after Jesus had announced to the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and on the third day rise again. When Peter heard this, he rebuked Jesus because he loved Jesus and did not want Him to die. Peter tried to stop Jesus from doing the very thing that God sent Him to do for our salvation. So Jesus rebuked Peter and said, ***"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*** (Mark 8:31-33)

Again, the night before Jesus was crucified Jesus warned the disciples to watch and pray because their faith would be tested by Satan. He told Peter, ***"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers, but he (Peter) replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."*** (Luke 22:31-34)

To deny Jesus was unthinkable for Peter. Yet, within hours Peter denied Jesus three times. How could that happen? How could Peter fail so miserably, despite his good intentions? We all have good intentions. Why then do we fail to do the will of God? Jesus tells us that the devil is constantly working to distract us from doing God's will and constantly working to destroy our relationship with the Lord.

St. Paul said of himself, ***“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”*** (Romans 7:15)

Again he wrote, ***“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** (Ephesians 6:10-12)

If you are like me frequently when I am struggling with a problem, I ask God to take the problem away. The servants too wanted to pull out the weeds and get rid of them. But the owner said, ***“No, you will hurt the good God wants to do. Leave it alone.”*** What I found out in my life is that instead of taking my problems away, God has brought me closer to Him and taught me to rely on His grace for my needs. God did not make my life easier. He made me stronger. The good seed represents people of faith. It represents you and me. Jesus describes us as sons of the kingdom. In Christ, we are heirs of God’s kingdom. Salvation is God’s gift to us. And as we trust in Christ the Holy Spirit transforms our lives so that we bear much fruit. ***“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”*** (Gal.5:22-24)

The parable talks about two different kinds of people in the world, the sons of God and the sons of the devil. But the truth is we are all sinners. All of us are saved only by the grace of God. In the parable Jesus said, no one will know who is good and who is bad until the time for harvest. Until the judgment, all our lives are intertwined. And Jesus is clear that God allows this so His full harvest may be realized. One of the worst things we can do is begin to judge people. Instead, God has called us to love people. This is what Christ did. St. Paul writes, ***“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might***

possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

There is always hope for all people, just think of what happened on the cross. Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. After seeing how deeply Jesus loved even His enemies, the one thief turned to Jesus and asked, ***“Jesus remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”*** Jesus said, ***“Today you shall be with me in paradise.”***

Over and over, Jesus told His disciples that God did not want them to be like the world, but to be in the world. Jesus prayed for the disciples and He prayed for all those who would believe in Him this way: ***“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”*** (John 17:15-19)

Jesus’s life was sanctified because He was committed to doing God’s will. He prayed, Father not My will but Thine be done and He yielded His life to die for us on the cross so we might have eternal life. In His prayer to the Father, Jesus prayed that we too might be sanctified to do the will of the Father. You and I have been planted by God to grow in faith where we are, in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our jobs, in our schools, on our sports teams to be a blessing. When I first read this parable I was struck by the judgment of God. I was struck by the clarity that the judgment of God is coming and there will be an accounting for sin. It really troubled me. But then I realized that the focus of the parable was on the harvest. Jesus died to make hell empty and to give eternal life to all who would believe in Him. We too are called by God not to judge others but to love them. May we together join Jesus on His mission to make sure that hell is empty, and heaven is full.