

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 6, 2017
St. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
Believers Must Live with Unbelievers until the Harvest
Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

When I was little, my mother sent me out to weed the garden. My dad had planted the seeds shortly before this, and the new green sprouts had just broken through the ground. Some of the vegetables looked a lot like the weeds that grew up with them. You can imagine what happened. Not being able to tell the difference between the two, I managed to pull up some of the good plants with the weeds. I did not know I was doing what Jesus' parable teaches us not to do.

Jesus told this parable of the weeds, with several others, to the large crowd that stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Our Lord was seated in a boat to have some distance between himself and the people. Later Jesus went into a house and his disciples asked him to explain this parable. You just heard the parable and Jesus' explanation.

What does Jesus' parable of the weeds mean for us? It speaks to believers having to live among unbelievers until Judgment Day. Then the harvest will take place that separates the two, and not before. We are not to try and bring about by force a world populated only by Christians. As we share the gospel of Jesus Christ we should not expect it to convert everybody.

Believers Must Live with Unbelievers until the Harvest. Now is not the time to eliminate unbelievers. God will do it on Judgment Day.

In last Sunday's gospel, the good seed was the saving gospel of Jesus' victory for us on his cross where he paid his righteousness for our sins and our guilt, and suffered our death and damnation. In this parable the good seed is Christians. We recognize the connection as the one creates the other. While God creates believers through the Word, his enemy, Satan, plants unbelievers at the same time. These grow together in the field Jesus identified as "the world."

We believers live in a world also inhabited by unbelievers. It will always be that way until Judgment Day. Now is not the time to eliminate the unbelievers. We cannot expect such a thing. The Augsburg Confessions states in Article 17, "They condemn also...that before the resurrection from the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed."

Believers have not always practiced that truth. James and John wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans to destroy them because they did not welcome Jesus. The crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, burning people at the stake like Jon Hus, declaring a heretic to be an outlaw with a price on his head like Luther all were intended to purify the world of unbelief. We may be guilty of wishing unbelievers evil or harm, or that they would just go away and leave us alone. We might be standoffish from them and worst of all, not wish to share God's Word with them.

It is hard to tell the difference between a believer and an unbeliever at times, just like those vegetables and weeds. There are sinful Christians and righteous non-Christians. Can you always tell the difference? Can you see into their hearts? Now is not the time to eliminate unbelievers. Now is the time to live with them and love them and evangelize them,

Only God knows the heart. We do not know which unbeliever today God intends to call to faith through the Word tomorrow, or next week, or next year, or on their death beds. We are not to end their time of grace, or withhold the Word from them. This world is theirs after all. Our citizenship is in heaven. We do well to be salt and light while it is still day.

We have the assurance that God will do it on Judgment Day. He will rescue his believers and take us into his kingdom of glory were the unbelievers cannot dwell. At that time we will know who the believers are and who the unbelievers are. No longer will we be subject to their opposition and denials. No longer will their temptations, or those that currently come from our own hearts, attack us. Then the seeds that now look so much alike will appear in their vast and glorious differences; one bearing fruit and the other dead branches.

Jesus made it clear in the explanation of his parable that he will cast the unbelievers into eternal damnation in hell. Remember that no one goes to hell because of sin since Jesus has paid for the sins of the world on the cross. A person is lost only through unbelief that rejects Christ as the one and only way of redemption and salvation.

God's instruments of this final deliverance of his believers are the holy angels. Jesus said, "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." The kingdom here is the saving work of the gospel on hearts as it is preached. No longer will anyone be able to repent and believe when Judgment comes.

There will be no second chance, no period of further cleansing between earth and heaven. The kingdom of grace offered to all will end and the kingdom of glory will commence in all its fullness. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun."

What is the lesson for us? "He who has ears, let him hear." You have ears. Listen to what your Savior is saying. God who called you to faith knows you live among unbelievers. One day we and they will receive out eternal destiny either through faith or unbelief. It is not for us to divide and conquer. That is the work of the Son of Man in whom you are justified before his Father in heaven. Amen. <SDG>