

“Eagerly Longing for the Harvest”

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man, who has sown, is sowing, and will continue to graciously sow His good seed throughout the world that He so loves, until the appointed time of harvest: may all who have ears that are eager to hear, hear, in earnest, His Word of good news. Amen.

Dearly beloved of God, you may have heard the following accusation levelled against the Church: “The Church is full of hypocrites!” Yes, “The Church is FULL of hypocrites!” If you haven’t heard it said yet, then at least you’re hearing it today, in here, where it is safe, instead of out there, where it is said so as to shake your sense of security by shaming you— yes, you, the Church, who are the fruit of what God has sown through His Son! You see, Satan seeks to sow discord and doubt. He seeks to discredit the God who has proclaimed that He has claimed you for Himself, as a part of His good harvest. So, quite often, we hear, or will certainly come to hear, charges against the Church. Satan will certainly deride Christ’s Bride by pointing out each spot and blemish. “The Church is full of hypocrites!” So, quite often, in response, the parable put before us is brought forth. Christians often say something along the following lines: “Well, you see, the Church is made up of wheat and tares, or weeds if you will; and therefore, you are wrongly railing against the righteous when the hypocrisy you are witnessing is actually the work of God’s enemy, the Devil, who has sown counterfeit Christians in the midst of

the real deal.” Now, the problem with this is two-fold: first, it is *not* the point of the parable; and, second, it sets up and supports the claim against the Church by foolishly falling into that false dichotomy that undergirds the charge against Her blessed saints. Now, to address the second point first, the saints, indeed, are not perfect (even though they will certainly be perfected, according to God’s promise). Each and every saint is, as we Lutherans say, “*simul justus et peccator*,” that is to say that they are “simultaneously (or, at the same time) just (or righteous) and a sinner.” Indeed, as Christians, we would be hypocrites only if we claimed otherwise. If we asserted that our actions— every thought, word, and deed— were the actions of the righteous, then we would surely be hypocrites. However, I would argue that, in the deepest sense, we Christians cannot be counted as being numbered among the hypocrites because we readily confess that we are poor, miserable sinners who sin in thought, word, and deed, both in what we do and what we fail to do. We admit that we regularly fail to keep God’s Law— that Law which was once written on tablets of stone and which all men find written upon their stoney hearts. We do not deny this to be the truth. We wisely do not claim otherwise. This is why, when we confess this to be true, we long to be absolved. So, I can confidently say that, given what we confess, we cannot rightly be considered “hypocrites” because we do not make the claim that we are, of our own accord, righteous. People in the Church and outside the Church ought not to be taken aback by our failings and faults since we state that this is the state of things quite succinctly when, at the very least, we gather every Sunday. If the Church is full of hypocrites, in so far as we fail to do what we assert all men ought to do and what all men ought to refrain from doing, then I suppose that we

ought to invite those who level such a charge of hypocrisy against us to join us themselves because there's plenty of room for yet another hypocrite of that sort. Now, returning to the first point— which missed the point of Jesus' parable— we know that the distinction between the wheat and the weeds is *not* made with the Church in mind because our Lord made it clear that the “field” into which the Enemy sowed “weeds” is *not* the Church, but the world.

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ has provided us with the proper interpretation of His parable about the weeds; and therefore, we ought not miss the point that He is making by trying to make our own point. This is not a parable about the condition of the Church. It is a parable that points to a particular truth that those who refuse to hear will never hear. Satan has their ear as he hisses his slanderous lies against the Saviour. The enemy of our souls seeks to sift us and shake our faith in our Saviour. Again, he works through the world, wherein he has sown many a sinful weed, taking advantage of our inflamed and fallen flesh so as to bring his accusations against *us*, those who are trusting in God alone to provide our pardon and have been set aside for salvation in Christ. Nevertheless, the weeds do work their way into our lives because we still live in the world, even though we are no longer of it. We look around us and we see Satan's weeds at work. Yes, there *is* evil in the world. We see suffering in God's world and then we are called upon to come to question His decency or His deity. “If God is good and God is all-powerful, then why is there such suffering? Either He is not good or He is too weak to be worthy of being called ‘God’. Why do bad things happen to good people? Perhaps He doesn't care enough about the world, or, more specifically, He doesn't really care enough about you

because He allows suffering and evil to befall you in the first place? Why is it that God is doing nothing?” Of course, here we find a false dichotomy that is presented with the sole purpose of sowing doubt into every soul that buys into it. We look around at the world around us and it seems as if its akin to an insane asylum being run by the inmates—inmates who are off of their meds! People starve in a world that produces plenty, far more than we could even begin to consume. Yet, many are starving. Many do, or will, suffer from sicknesses for which cures abound. Of course, much of this misery is manmade. Yet, as to our parable, it tells us that there is an Enemy who has sown his own to ensure just such a *status quo*. So, from here, where do we go?

Our Lord has given us an answer and, indeed, He is our answer. First, to answer the question of why He doesn't just pull out all of the weeds from His field, we are told that He doesn't desire to pull all the weeds out at this time, because He is merciful. It is not because He is unable or uncaring, but because He is merciful. While we would seek the way of the servants' solution, to just uproot the weeds, He knows that to do so prematurely will only bring harm to the seed which He has sown. Nevertheless, there will be a harvest. You see, while many a weed of the Devil will definitely try to bring us to doubt and to despair, deriding our God's desire to do what is right or trying to get us to deny His divinity, by which He would have the power to make things right, we know that our God is *not* doing nothing, but has, in fact, done everything to deal with our dilemma. He gives us the answer that there *will* be a harvest, a day of reckoning. He has given us His Son to be the safe refuge in which we would weather such a storm. Jesus is God's answer to the problem of evil. Evil demands a response from God. God being good is,

therefore, gracious, merciful, and just. If we were to seek after the solution suggested by the servants in the parable, we too would be uprooted. Since God is just, the fire, into which all weeds must burn, burns for us all, because Satan played a part in planting within the fertile soil of Adam and Eve's hearts his weed of faithlessness which flowered into every expression of sin which has, ever since that day, borne nothing but bitter fruit for all of their offspring. You see, there are no truly "good" people in this world, irrespective of how we may try and frame it to appear as though that is the case. All are conceived in sin and have sinned. Only God is good. Yet, God graciously sent His Son in mercy to mete out justice by bearing it all upon Himself, hung upon a tree that was planted for this purpose from before the world's foundation. God is not indifferent to our suffering (that suffering which we have brought upon ourselves individually, and collectively, on account of our sins against God, His world, and one another). God suffers for our sake. By His wounds we are healed. For the sake of the "sons of the kingdom" the only-begotten Son of the King of Kings was sent into the world. He came to seek and to save. So, trusting in the truth that God moved heaven and earth for our salvation, what is the status of Satan's slander? Does God have the desire to save? The answer is "yes" in Christ Jesus. Does God have the power to save? The answer is "yes" in Christ Jesus— He who defeated both death and Devil to wipe every tear away!

Dearly beloved of God, the parable of the weeds is not given to us to try and discern who among us will be brought like sheaves into a barn rather than burned as chaff, on the day when God reaps His harvest. It is given to us to assure us that, even though we are scattered throughout this world in which the Enemy has also sown his

own, God is careful and caring, tending the field. While Satan would seek to sow doubt and divide us, God will nevertheless gather us together as we grow alongside that which was planted in order to choke our faith. As we grow together, we recognize that if the weeds, the tares, the darnel, resembles the wheat in the stages before the harvest is ripe, then the converse is also true: the wheat bears a striking resemblance to the weed.

Bearing this in mind, we are mindful of the fact that we do not confess what the world would have us say about God or about ourselves. We turn, instead, to God's Word as the sole word upon which we find rest for our souls. Like the creation itself, we too eagerly long for the revealing of those who are clothed in Christ's righteousness to be fully conformed into Christ's image, radiating the glory of Him who made us, through His good Word, to be good seed, the "sons of the kingdom." No longer mere creatures, we are adopted as sons of the Creator by being united to His Son. The creation that was subjected to bondage, decay, and death, now eagerly await the fulfillment of its Creator's promise of freedom—the promise in which we walk and in which remain as we await the harvest, giving ear to the only One who says what we must hear. In His name: AMEN.

May the Word of the Lord take root in our hearts and minds so as to bear His good fruit in our lives. Amen.