

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 9
July 23, 2023
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Let God sort it out

—Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

If you've ever done any gardening, whether you're raising food or growing flowers, you know that as soon as you plant the seed you have to deal with the weeds. If you're a beginning gardener, and you don't know exactly what each kind of plant looks like, sometimes it's hard to distinguish between what is a weed and what is a desirable plant that's supposed to be there. If you want to know what's what, there's a very simple way to tell the difference. Pull everything up! Yank everything out! What grows back will be the weeds.

Obviously, that doesn't give us the results we're looking for. That won't get you a beautiful flower bed or a thriving vegetable garden, but it does illustrate the lesson that Jesus is teaching us in this parable.

Last week Pastor Pufahl reminded us that the Word of God is scattered like seed that falls on different kind of soil. We cannot control where the seed falls or what crop it will produce; God is the one who gives the increase. The seed that falls on good soil represents the Word of God that takes root in the heart of a Christian. It grows and bears abundant fruit.

Today Jesus teaches us another parable with another truth: A Christian lives as wheat among weeds. We Christians grow and thrive and produce fruit in an environment where we are surrounded by weeds. We live in an environment that is sinful, hostile to Jesus and his Word, hostile to Jesus' followers. We are surrounded by wickedness. This is the field—the world—in which we have been planted. Jesus' point in this parable is simple: it's always going to be this way, for as long as this world endures. There is nothing we can do to change this reality. It will not change until the final harvest, the end of the world, when we are released from this flesh and form life in this world, and we are taken into the perfection of heaven. Meanwhile we have to contend with sin and evil and wickedness and persecution and hostility all around us. There is nothing we can do that is going to change this reality. We are strangers and foreigners and aliens in this world; we are citizens of heaven. We are just pilgrims passing through; our destination is eternity.

Now this causes me problems. Many of you know me well enough to know that I like to fix things. I like to fix cars. I like to fix things around the house. I like things to be working right. I like to strive for excellence, and I don't like to put up with things that are broken down and mediocre. But there are some things that I cannot fix—and I don't mean mechanical or electrical or plumbing things. I mean the problems of sin and evil in the world. I cannot fix those things. Oh, trust me, I would *like* to fix some things. If I were in control, I would fix a lot of things about our society that are broken. Sexual immorality, homosexual behavior, ignorance and apathy about spiritual things, hatred and discrimination, laziness and apathy, vice and addiction, cartels and violence, envy and greed—let's go after them all! There are times when I would like to see God deliver a well-placed thunderbolt to eradicate particularly wicked people: ruthless dictators, godless leaders, violent criminals. A lightning bolt from heaven would make the world a better place—at least according to my thinking.

Do you ever feel that way? I know you do. Sometimes we get so frustrated and angry at the wickedness all around us that we wish God would just yank all the weeds out of the field. But God doesn't do that. God doesn't just "zap" people when they sin. Why not? First, if God punished every sin immediately, I wouldn't be here anymore because I would have been "zapped" a long time ago for my wicked thoughts, words, and actions. You wouldn't be here either. Second, God tells us that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that they repent and live (Ezekiel 33:11). God gives each human being a time of grace in this life, and he fervently wants all people to repent of their sins, trust in Jesus as their Savior, and be saved eternally. This is the unfathomable thing about God's grace: he loves the wicked and the immoral and the unbelieving and the atheist. He loves them with a love that we cannot even begin to understand. He shed his blood for them. He gave his life for them. He wants them to turn from their ways before it is too late and the day of final destruction does come.

When God looks over this tangled, weed-infested world, do you really think he is unable to untangle it and sort it all out? Do you think that just because God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance, that God is unable to deliver justice? Jesus says the day of final reckoning is coming. At the harvest, at the final judgment, God's angels will separate the weeds from the wheat, the wicked from the righteous, and the weeds will be burned in unquenchable fire. The wicked, the unbelieving, the impenitent—they're heading for hell, for eternal torment in a lake of fiery sulfur, for everlasting separation from God's kindness. Scripture says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). Do you think that any justice you could

administer according to your schedule even begins to compare with the horrifying eternal death that God has prepared for the damned? God has the problem of sin and wickedness well under his control. Let God sort it out.

There's an interesting account in the Gospel of Luke about two of Jesus' disciples who wanted God to deliver immediate justice. Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, and Jesus sent messengers ahead into a village of the Samaritans to get things ready for them. The Samaritans were hostile toward the Jews, so they didn't welcome Jesus and his disciples. The disciples James and John asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" (Luke 9:54). Jesus had to rebuke his disciples for such a thought. James and John earned themselves the nickname "Sons of Thunder" for their impertinence. Ironically, after Jesus' ascension, it was to this very region of Samaria that the gospel spread, and later many of the Samaritans became Christians! James' and John's desire for immediate retribution would have prevented these people from receiving the gospel. God had a better plan. Let God sort it out.

So we as Christians live in this world as wheat among weeds, surrounded by wickedness, waiting for the final harvest when God will sort everything out. Does that mean that we just sit on our hands and do nothing while we wait? No! There are some very important things that you and I as Christians want to be doing, as we wait for God to sort it all out.

Here's the first thing: Search your own heart! Repent of your own sins! Identify and root out the evil in your own life! What good is it if we are filled with righteous indignation at all the evil all around us, when our own hearts are corrupt and deceived and straying! Ask yourself, "Am I caught up in sin? What do I need to repent of?" Spiritual pride? Moral superiority? What good is it if I lambast the wickedness all around me but end up in hell myself? The Apostle Paul knew how easy it is to fall into the sin of hypocrisy, so he said, "I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Scripture cautions us, "Brothers if anyone is caught in a sin, those of you who are spiritual should restore him gently; but watch yourself, or you too may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Guard your heart! Cling to Jesus in great humility and deep appreciation for the grace you have been given in Christ, and do not take your forgiveness for granted.

Second, as you go through life, don't just stick your head in the sand and pretend to ignore the wicked world. God has called you and me to be salt and light in the world, to be beacons of truth. Take a stand against sin. Call it out. Be active in your community as one who stands for what is upright and godly. Jesus teaches us, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Don't go along with the crowd. Be an example of godliness and morality. Don't let yourself be known by how grumpy and angry and frustrated you are but by how kind and compassionate you are.

Third, be a witness for the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. Scatter the seed of the gospel. Spread the Word. Share the good news of God's love in Christ, who died on the cross to take away the sin of the world and rose again to destroy death. You are in Jesus, your sins are forgiven, you are right with God; let the joy of your salvation spill over into the lives of others. Point people to the cross of Jesus, where sin is forgiven and peace with God is found. The gospel, the good news of forgiveness in Jesus our Savior, is the only thing that can change hearts and transform lives, that can declare the wicked righteous and the guilty forgiven. That's it! Only the gospel! Laws and rules can do no such thing; they can coerce outward behavior, but they cannot change the heart. It is impossible to legislate morality. We cannot make people better people by making more rules. Our job as Christians is not to make the world "less sinful." That is an impossible task. Our privilege is to share the powerful, life-changing gospel of forgiveness, and when we share Jesus, we unleash the power of the Holy Spirit.

Beyond that, let God sort it out. And God *will* sort it out! Amen.