

Pentecost 7A – July 19, 2020
Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
Trinity Lutheran Church, Fairview Village
Pastor Stacey-Kyle Rea

In the name of the Father, and + the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is the fruit, and what is the weed?

It can be tough in the first weeks of a planting season to figure out the difference between something you meant to plant, and something that decided to grow. To confuse weeds or grass with the actual seedlings you planted.

You have to wait until the plant grows to see the difference.

The wheat and the weeds in Jesus story today were easily confused. They looked identical until right before harvest time. So if you tried to pull up the weeds too soon, you would likely destroy at least some of your wheat crop too.

The roots entangle and intertwine between the wheat and weed plants. Only when it bears fruit will the true crop be revealed.

In Matthew's time, it was hard to tell the difference between a true believer of Christ and someone who had bad intentions. Believers and nonbelievers in a huge crowd tend to look the same on the surface. But at the core, in the depths of our roots, there are signs of difference, too.

Wheat and weeds. Luther's way of saying this is that we are at once Sinner and Saint. Not 50/50 or half and half. 100% sinner. And through the miracle of God's tending and forgiveness, 100% saint.

Today's parable is a lesson in just how enmeshed good and evil can be. It can be hard to tell the difference. Jesus wants us to carry one thing in our hearts: the final judgement of which plants bear fruit and which plants destroy – that judgement belongs solely to God.

That's hard for us to hear. Judgment of what is right and wrong can be a hobby for many of us. Labels like "good", "bad", "evil", "holy", "unholy" are easy to dish out.

We want the "bad guys" to pay. People who do terrible things. People who kill, steal, harm children. Surely they deserve swift punishment, right? Civil justice for all.

Except we are human. And humans have a way of oppressing others for the sake of what we see as "good." Segregation in our country was anything but "good", and yet there are voices of "good" Christian people defending the need to separate ourselves from other humans.

Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the "colored" section of the bus for a white passenger. Her act of defiance was life-changing for many black people in this country. But somewhere in our history, a group of people decided that black people were to be segregated from white people, as if we were segregating wheat from weed.

The traumatic effects of those decisions still haunt us and the systems we live in today. God gives us every chance to bear fruit, no matter the color of our skin. For we are all made in the image of God. But we humans, when we try to get involved in judgment of good and bad, our roots become entangled with evil. Evil can choke us and our ability to see the fruit in every person.

It's easy to distance ourselves from these events. I wasn't even alive when Rosa Parks bravely stood for her rights...and all peoples' rights. I wasn't alive when thousands upon thousands of German Christians accepted that millions of people would be gassed in chambers on their watch. But I am alive today, and I see that the systems that allowed the evil of racism to flourish are still trying to choke the ones trying to thrive.

It can be hard to tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds. The good and the evil.

This parable is about God's kingdom.

And in God's kingdom, we don't have the final say. We don't get to judge the ones among us. We don't get to tell God whether we are wheat or whether we are weeds.

Good and evil grow side by side. Surely we see this in the world. Two groups warring over who is right. Both groups claiming God is on their side. When really, what we should be saying is **we are on God's side**.

Ask any soldier. They have seen good and evil in the same place. Ask any refugee who has fled their home. I am betting good and evil were dwelling side by side, forcing an impossible decision to leave their homeland. Ask any child living in poverty today. Evil comes in the form of hungry bellies, judgmental adults, bullying from other kids. And a sense that they aren't important enough.

Ask anyone, and you will hear a story or two about what evil is in this world.

But I'm betting you will also hear a story about where they found God in the midst. Wheat bearing remarkable fruit in unexpected places.

Black lives matter. Evil surrounds the reason we have to proclaim this in our country; because for too long, the entire system that declared freedom and justice for all didn't include everyone. It didn't include black slaves. It didn't include women. We can't say all and mean only some. That's why as Christians, it is important to recognize that all doesn't always mean all. Jesus is always pointing us in the direction of the ones society excludes.

Wheat. Weeds. Depending on where you stand, you might think your opinion is of the wheat. But in any conflict, it is essential for us to see the humanity even in the one we differ with. Even when we are convinced we know which is wheat and which is weed. We never really know.

Knowing is God's job. Labeling each other as wheat or weed doesn't help us see God's kingdom. Instead, we are to continue the harvest. To continue to sow and plant and water and nurture all things that grow. Nurture ourselves, and our brothers and sisters of all other faiths and skin colors and nationalities.

God will do the weeding in the garden of our lives. When we stumble, when we fall, it is good to leave the weeding to God. God has a remarkable ability to forgive, to love us back into wheat when the roots of our hearts become overrun with weeds. To see the fruit in us, even amidst the evil we encounter.