

2014_07_20 Pentecost 6
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

The Harvest Is in Christ's Hands

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

INI

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

²⁴ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶ But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷ So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' ' "

...

³⁶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."

³⁷ He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. ³⁹ The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

To you who are saints by His calling: grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Beloved of God,

"Why?" we wonder. "Why must evil exist?" God claims supreme power over our lives and over all things, yet it often seems as if He is not ruling at all. Chaos is in charge. The world is divided. Christianity is divided. Families are divided. The lives of God's

people are beset by sin. Why does He not root it out? We look over this field which is the world and wonder if God's kingdom is a losing cause.

Last summer I made a go at growing oats in the garden as a cover crop. I scattered the seed and raked the ground and waited to see what would happen. Weeks later things started growing. The problem was, I couldn't really tell what was oat and what was not. I couldn't distinguish between the plants I wanted and the plants I didn't. If I started to weed out the field, I was just as likely to pull out the oats as I was anything else.

A tare is a wild plant that looks just like wheat. It disguises itself as a wheat, making it very difficult in the early season to distinguish between the wanted wheat and the unwanted weed. The master of the field tells his servants to wait. Wait until the harvest, "lest you uproot the wheat along with the tares. Let both grow together until the harvest."

Some think the kingdom of heaven is something that will be seen in this world. Some think of God's kingdom as God ruling on earth in a visible, tangible, political, economic, and social way. They speak of peace in Middle East. They look at the events in Gaza and urge more support for Israel; they support the Jews not necessarily because they feel their actions are justified, but because they imagine that this is how the kingdom of God will come. They imagine Christ returning to Jerusalem and establishing a political throne from which He will rule the world in the final age. Some imagine God's kingdom is something which roots out evil by force and brings peace to our lives on earth.

And indeed the kingdom does touch down in our lives on earth – just not in the way so many imagine. The kingdom of God is a strange and cosmic event hidden from our eyes, but revealed in our hearts. God's rule is reserved, restrained from its fullness until the last day. It is restrained, but touches our lives on earth in the presence of Jesus Christ and the preaching of His Word.

The Lord opens His mouth in a parable and utters His kingly reign kept secret from the foundation of the world. There are things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world, yet now are revealed unto you. They are not seen in the events unfolding in Palestine. They are not seen in the presence or absence of evil in this world; rather Jesus speaks of things kept secret – mysteries hidden from the multitudes of this world but revealed unto those whom the Lord has chosen. Jesus opens His mouth in a parable and reveals that the final harvest of His kingdom is in His hands alone. It is like a farmer who went out to sow.

Jesus sows the good seed. The Son of Man is the Lord of creation and he grows nothing but goodness. He knows nothing of evil and has nothing to do with the way of Satan. So are born the sons of God, the heirs of the kingdom. So in all His words and works He plants something good. In His ministry of compassion and His willful suffering on the cross, He sows something good. In His death and resurrection, goodness burst forth in the earth and the kingdom of heaven makes itself known to you.

But while mankind is unaware, the devil finds his way into this field; into the world he comes, entering where he does not belong and giving birth to his own sort. The enemy has found his way into the midst of God's own kingdom and has sown something evil among us.

The angels watch it all and are anxious to act. As God's holy messengers, these servants are responsible for carrying out God's judgment in the world. But as the angels look upon this early crop, they are told to wait. They are told to wait for the plants to reach maturity. They wait for the end of the age, where God's kingdom will cast out all things that offend and that are characterized by lawlessness. They wait for the end when they will gather in the good harvest, the seeds sown by Christ. In the mean time, this kingdom and the future harvest remain in the hands of the Lord and no one else, not even the angels.

While they wait, the wheat and tares become intermingled. The devil has hidden himself among them wearing a mask. He appears here, among us and in our midst – and he masks himself as something good, something like us, something appealing. We see an image we want to emulate; something desirable

Pretty soon our roots are tangled. The believers life is caught up in those things which the devil has sown, and our faith is in danger. A believer marries an unbelieving spouse. A believer gets caught up in something at work which is dishonest. A believer gets mixed up with the wrong friends. A believer begins hiding things from his family. A believer is tangled up in something which the devil has sown and it threatens to choke out his faith and leave him cast out with the .

But Christ says to his angels, "wait." The work of His kingdom is to sow something good and to bring it to full harvest. The work of His kingdom is a mystery which sows its seed and prospers its work wherever the gospel is preached. He says, "wait, for the harvest is in my hands."

The harvest is in Christ's hands. Into His hands have been placed the hope of all creation. His hands reached into this world and planted something good. His pierced hands show us the labor of his death and His resurrection show us the fruit of His life. He is the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep and He will on the last day raise up all who wait and hope in Him.

But Christ says to you, "wait." Wait with the angels. As you consider others in your life whose roots might be tangled with the devil, wait. Remember that the kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdom of men. It comes not by force nor does it happen by our doing. It is not our work to take things into our own hands to destroy all that offends. It is not the work of the Church to root out all evil in the world by force, but to do so by God's grace. The rule of His kingdom is the rule of grace and the love of Christ which calls us to hope in God's purpose. So it is our place to show patience and demonstrate the hope of the gospel in all we say and do. Christ says to you, "wait."

So God's kingdom comes indeed without our asking, and we pray that it would come to us and work for us and dwell in us. The kingdom of God is a strange even which makes us sons of God by rooting us in God's grace.

Old Testament Israel was a nation that had to wait and had to rely on God's grace. In Deuteronomy 7, we find a nation on the brink of war. These descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not much to look at. They are families made up of farmers and shepherders. They never had a land to call their own; they do not have a king to call their own. Their property is only that which they can carry and they carry that which God had given to them. And now this people, short in stature, meager in weaponry stands poised to launch a campaign against the mighty nations of Canaan. So they have set up camp in the land of the Amorites, east of the Jordan and God's command is to cross the river and overthrow the mighty nations of Canaan. What would make them think they could overcome such odds?

The LORD says in Psalm 78 "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord and His strength and His wonderful works." In the psalm, the psalmist recounts those wonderful works: how He has been faithful to His covenant, how He has kept His promises, how He has given them His word from generation to generation. He has delivered them from the hand of the Egyptians, He has raised the Red Sea and brought them through on dry ground. He has split the rock and made them drink. He has rained manna from heaven.

Still they rebelled, still they doubted. They did not believe Him. They did not trust His salvation. Psalm 78 recounts how their heart turned away, they lied to him, and they broke His covenant. But He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them. For He knew, this was His chosen people, and He knew, that among all the evil seeds that were sown, there was still good, His chosen remnant would be preserved, a remnant from which would come a Savior.

So as they stand on the brink of warfare, and God would have them know that His kingdom comes not by their doing or might, but by His grace:

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (Deuteronomy 7:6–9)

In these dark sayings of old, in these parables, God reminds us that you are in His hands. The harvest is in His. You are chosen by grace. You are a chosen nation, a holy and royal priesthood. You are a kingdom of priests, where God rules not by might and force, but by His priesthood, which is rooted in Christ and His resurrection. It is by His grace that Christ has been born, the good seed that was sown in this wicked earth and has given birth to something eternally good.

He gives birth to you in baptism – a son of His kingdom. And He will preserve you unto the end when the angels will reap. The angels will reap all that offends and cast out all who are characterized by lawlessness. They will reap until all that is left are the left overs. Just a remnant remain. These are God’s chosen, elect, baptized, forgiven, righteous sons. These are sons of His grace and sons of His kingdom and they shine like the sun. They shine in the Son and the Son of God shines through them because the fruit of all they say and do is accomplished in Him.

You will shine like the sun. For in the Son you do shine. In Christ, you have risen and a new day has dawned. It is by His righteousness that you are righteous and by His glory that you reach glory.

God’s kingdom work is to rule in your heart. His work is to captivate you by the call of Christ and the message of His grace. It is to forgive you and to bring you under Christ

where you shine as the Son. Even now you are shining, though it is hidden from the world.

This is Paul says,

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.
(Colossians 2:6–7)

Even now your works proclaim what has risen in your hearts. The fruit of the kingdom cannot be restrained and it is yours now in Christ to make clear which kingdom and which harvest you belong to.

This involves a humble distinction between what is sown of God and what is sown of Satan. God's kingdom is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are the definition of God's rule. So that your behavior is governed by His righteousness, His peace, and His joy in His Holy Spirit.

As sons of the kingdom we return into our callings this week. As sons of the kingdom, what would we God have us do? He would have us remember: the harvest is in Christ's hands.

May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10–11)