

Sermon – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8:12-25

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Grace Lutheran Church

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### “In the Weeds”

Friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It's good to be back! This week, most of our twenty-seven-person mission team returned from our trip to Slovakia. Leading Vacation Bible School was, as always, an incredible experience. You should consider making the trip some time! On the final day of VBS, we gathered in the church square with over one hundred children and dozens of Slovak helpers to sing songs, share skits, and just generally celebrate the week with parents, grandparents, and passersby. There we were, singing our heads off about how majestic is our Lord, right in public. It was a bit goofy, in the most wonderful way. It also wouldn't have happened forty years ago. We would have been arrested by the StB, the secret police. While the church was tolerated, barely, during the years of communism, the official state policy was atheism. For two generations, the weeds threatened to choke out the wheat completely. It is amazing what our God can do given a bit of time and the faithfulness of a few. Goodness, that more than God needs, who can create out of nothing. That Friday two weeks ago in the church square was an abundant harvest, a bumper crop for the Kingdom.
2. We live in a world of wheat and weeds, good and evil. Jesus gives us another agricultural parable here today; the Sower is back at work. This time, the issue is not the soil quality. The problem seems to be that his neighbor doesn't like him very much. In the night, an enemy comes and sows weeds

- among the wheat. The servants come, eager to enact a solution: Master, should we go and pull up the weeds? But the Sower encourages forbearance. It is better to let them both grow up together, lest you pull up the wheat with the weeds. We'll sort it out at the harvest. I'm not sure if this actually any way to run a farm in the real world, but the parable's point is surprisingly clear. In this world in which there is so much good and so much evil, it is simply not always the best response to run around pulling up weeds. Sometimes, we have to wait and see what God will do. For some things, we will simply have to wait until this world passes away and the new world, weed free, breaks in.
3. In this world of evil and suffering, perhaps Jesus' words leave us wanting, at least at first. Do we simply sit around and tolerate evil? A few things. First, this parable is a reminder that evil is not simply out there. We are so good these days, regardless of where we are located on the political and ideological spectrums, at seeing the evil in others. We are less good at seeing it in ourselves, the logs in our own eyes and all that. As Robert Farrar Capon writes, "Since good and evil in this world commonly inhabit not only the same field but even the same individual human beings . . . the only result of a truly dedicated campaign to get rid of evil will be the abolition of literally everybody." And second, Jesus' words here are not a moratorium on the call to work for justice and peace in our world. But Jesus does limit the scope of our role. We are called to work boldly against particular evils and injustices. Where we get into trouble is when we try to get rid of Evil and Injustice entirely; I know of no example yet of an attempt to create a perfect society that has not turned back on itself in tyranny. Jesus, it seems, does not want his name attached to such projects.
  4. So perhaps our focus should be less on eliminating the weeds and more on nurturing the wheat. How do we care for the good things in this world of suffering? How do we nurture faith in the face of evil? We remember and proclaim that, regardless of worldly status, we are children of God. The one

we call out to as Abba will always listen and is always with us in our suffering. This world's groanings are not the end, and what we see with our own eyes is not all there is. We hope for what we do not see, and that sort of hope requires patience. Without this hopeful patience is the rhythm of confession and absolution, as we remember over and over again that we are sinners who contribute to evil and suffering but are now and always forgiven and set free to work for good, for the Kingdom that will come and is present even now. To mix parables, the seed that is thrown into the cold ground of death will, by God's grace, yield the fruit of resurrection.

5. This Wednesday, the church commemorates Mary Magdalene, the first preacher of the resurrection. In that wonderful reading from John 20 that we hear each year at the Easter Vigil, when Mary first sees the risen Jesus, she mistakes him for the gardener. The scene is, by turns, both poignant and funny. How could she not recognize Jesus? Then again, how could she, when up to that moment death had been the final word? But maybe there's another layer we can tease out here, the simple truth that even if Mary is mistaken, she's not wrong. For who is Jesus if not the Good Gardener, faithfully tending his plantings in the midst of all that would seek to do them harm?
  
6. Today, in just a few minutes, God's Word will be planted in Colin William as he is brought to the font of God's grace, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This claiming of Colin by God does not promise an existence apart from the weeds of the world, which will appear from within and without. But God promises to be with Colin always, and that his growth will come, blossoming into abundant life in this world and the next. Parenting is an interesting thing, to say the least. On the one hand, changes come quicker than we can keep up with. On the other hand, it is long, slow, delightful work as we watch children become who they are. As for children, so for the children of God, nourished and nurtured by the Good Gardener. As for Colin, so for all of us. Be patient and hopeful. Work for good, knowing that

the full work belongs to God. Confess your own sins first while trusting wholeheartedly that those sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. Stand fast, knowing this world's sufferings don't hold a candle to the glory that will come. And keep your eyes open, for you never know when signs of the harvest might break forth. From church squares in Slovakia to baptismal fonts in River Forest, the harvest is plentiful, for our God is good. Who knows what is next? Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.