

The 7th Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Let me begin today, by asking you: “Do you think our world is getting better or getting worse? For a few years at the beginning of the 20th Century, most Americans were very optimistic that the world was moving toward utopia.

They thought the world was getting better and better. But when World War I came, the war that supposed to end all wars, didn't and within a few decades, the world saw and experienced World War II, in which there was so much more loss of life and destruction, needless to say, a lot of people didn't see utopia right around the corner.

There doesn't seem to be, too many people in the 21st Century who believe that the world is getting any better. For instance, with the rise of terrorism world-wide, certain rogue nations such as North Korea having nuclear capability, and Iran in the process of moving towards having a nuclear weapon, which will shift the balance of power in the Middle East has the world on edge.

Right now the world is facing economic instability, Red China is on the move in the Pacific Rim, Russia is on the move in eastern Europe, and with just the right circumstances, conflict in the Middle East could throw us into World War III very quickly.

Things seem to be going from bad to worse. Actually, almost every generation thinks that the world is going to the dogs. I found this humorous poem that expresses this idea.

“My granddad, viewing earth's worn cogs, Said, Things are going to the dogs. His granddad, in his house of logs, Said, Things are going to the dogs. And his granddad, in the Flemish bogs, Said, Things are going to the dogs. And his granddad, in his old skin togs, Said, Things are going to the dogs. But there's one thing I have to state: The dogs have had a good long wait.”

Vance Havner once said, “I used to say the world was going to the dogs, but I've stopped saying that out of respect for dogs!”

So, are things going to get better or are they going to get to worse? Jesus answers that question in this parable found in Matthew 13: 24-30

Jesus said: “The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from? He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds, you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Then Jesus' disciples asked Him about that particular parable. Jesus continues on, He says: (this is in verse 37) “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his

angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears, listen.” (37-43)

Whenever you hear a parable of Jesus, there is always the natural truth of the story itself, and then, there is the supernatural layer of meaning below the surface.

The good news about this parable, is that we don't have to speculate about the meaning, the Lord gives us, a full interpretation.

In our parable for today, the farmer or sower, planted wheat seeds, but there was another farmer or sower, who is wicked, and with evil intent, slips into the field at night and planted weeds among the wheat to destroy the wheat field.

Now if you remember, in the parable of the sower, Jesus tells of a farmer who sows seed, but the seed falls on different types of soil, (this is in the beginning of chapter 13), in this parable, the soil is the same, but the seeds are different.

So as the wheat begins to grow, so do the weeds. A weed that often infests wheat fields is called, “Darnel”. It looks like wheat in the early stages. For instance, in Kansas, the wheat farmers have nicknamed it “cheat”. So the wheat and the cheat grow together. The farmer's servants questioned the farmer, or sower, and he said, “An enemy has done this.”

In the parable, the over-zealous servants wanted to go out into the field and rip up the weeds. But the farmer or sower, tells them, to let the weeds and the wheat grow together. Pulling out the weeds would hurt the wheat.

So when the time comes for the harvest, the servants will go out into the field, and cut down the wheat, and the weeds, the wheat will be separated from the weeds.

The weeds are to be bundled up and burned. And the wheat was bundled into sheaves and placed in the farmer's barn. This is the natural story, but there is a super-natural meaning.

The truth of the matter is, at God's harvest, all believers will be gathered to heaven, and those who reject Christ will be separated from God in the fire of eternity.

Jesus made it perfectly clear, that we have an enemy who is actively opposing God's work in this world.

The word He used for “enemy” is from the word, “hate”. The devil hates God's work and hates God's people and his plan is to try to sabotage God's plan.

He (the devil) does this by planting bad people (the mal-contented) in the world. God gets blamed for a lot of evil in the world, but the devil plants the bad seeds, not God.

Have you ever noticed for some people, that when tragedy strikes, suddenly God gets blamed. The devil must laugh with glee every time God gets blamed for his evil schemes.

Some people like to say that the devil is alive and well, living on planet earth. Well, the devil is alive, but he is not doing well.

Since the death of Christ on the cross, the devil has been fighting a losing battle, and will continue to lose. Through the merits of Christ, Christ has destroyed the works of the devil.

God foretold in the story of Genesis, chapter 3, that the serpent would strike the heel of the Messiah, but that the Messiah, would crush Satan's head.

A heel wound isn't fatal, but a crushed head is a fatal blow. And since Jesus' death on the cross, Jesus has continued to crush the serpents head. And one day, the crushing will be complete.

The Book of Revelation (chapter 20, verse 10) foretells of that time, St. John writes: "And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

Satan, our adversary, is like a spiritual suicide bomber. He knows about his final punishment, so he is trying to take as many people with him as he can, as he goes out with a bang.

Remember, God is in charge, God is in control, and God will put an end to evil. Be encouraged church, we have won, the victory is ours through Christ.

These weeds are planted throughout the world, but there are some that have infiltrated the church.

Whenever God creates something, Satan always tries to counterfeit it. When you hear the word, "counterfeit", what comes to your mind? Usually money.

Do you know how bank tellers and cashiers are taught to recognize counterfeit money? The bank tellers become so familiar with the real currency, that when a counterfeit bill is placed in their hands, they can see and feel the difference.

God is producing authentic believers, and Satan has planted counterfeit believers in churches. For instance, some church people have bought into the devil's lie, that all paths lead to the same place, and that all of us, regardless of what we believe, will make it into heaven. (this is called universalism)

What these people don't understand, is that the only way to God, the only way to Heaven, is to be re-born or to be born-again, through baptism, by faith, in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, your faith and your trust must be in Jesus Christ, nothing else, nothing else will save you, not your denomination, not your rituals, nothing else!

Billy Graham once said, "That his greatest mission field, has been the rolls of churches." During his crusades about 70% of the people saved were already members of churches. (These people never really knew Christ).

This is in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 7, verse 21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name? Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, go away from me, you evildoers.'" (vs 21 through 23)

These religious people who knew the right things to say. They said, "Lord, Lord", we did good deeds such as casting out demons, we prophesied, we did these good things in your name. But Jesus will say, "I never knew you."

Salvation is knowing Christ. It's not enough to know about Jesus Christ, it is knowing Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior by faith, living for Him and not for the world. It's about putting Christ on the throne of your heart, not self.

I know from the history books about George Washington, he was the first President of the United States from 1789 to 1797. He was commander of the American Army, (Continental Army) during the American Revolutionary War. He presided over the 1787 convention, that drafted the United States Constitution. He was born in the State of Virginia on February 11th, 1731. That's all I can tell you about George Washington. I never knew George Washington.

Here is the difference: in my walk of faith, I know Jesus Christ, as my Lord and Savior, it is only through faith in Him, by the grace of God, that like you, I was baptized into His death and resurrection, therefore, not only do I know Him, I am marked and sealed as His own forever, I am His child, I belong to Him, and one day you and I will see Him face to face. The world out there cannot change that.

OK, so what does all this mean? First of all, Jesus is giving us a glimpse at the coming judgement, when He returns in power and in glory in the near future. The sheep will be separated from the goats and the wheat from the weeds.

The question should be, not whether the world is getting better or worse, because we know as we move towards the return of Christ, the world will only get worse, the question should be, am I living faithfully as the wheat?

At the final harvest, when that time comes, only God knows who will be saved. Some of us will be surprised as to who is there in God's Kingdom and who isn't.

Remember, God is on His time-table, not ours. If I were God, I would do away with evil, very quickly, but I am not God.

God has a plan to eliminate evil at His final harvest. Until then, we must be patient. That doesn't mean that we should accept, embrace or ignore evil.

Until Christ returns, our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to be faithful, vigilant, watchful, and to live faithfully.

We are called to be the salt of the earth. We are to be agents, to help slow down the moral corruption of our world.

We are called to be the light of the world, in the midst of moral darkness and spiritual ignorance.

Let us not despair, because God will eliminate all evil at His Final Harvest. God's judgment is slow, but never late. So let us be patient, the harvest is coming, and it will come.

And I'll close out the message with this short story: In 1895 a man by the name of "Pearl Wait", came up with a way to mix fruit syrup with gelatin. His wife, called his concoction, "Jell-O". After trying to market Jell-O for a couple of years, Mr. Wait couldn't wait.

Mr. Wait became impatient with the slow sales, so he sold the rights to the recipe to his neighbor, Frank Woodward, for 450.00.

By 1905, sales of Jell-O reached 1 million and General Foods, later bought out Mr. Woodward's Jell-O company. Today, because of his impatience, not one of Pearl's descendants get a penny of royalty from the sale of 1.1 million boxes of Jell-O sold everyday.

It has been said, "Good things come to those who wait." We must wait patiently for the return of Christ, and the time of God's final harvest, and live faithfully until the day of His return. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, as believers in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, we profess our faith in Him, because in the end, at the time of your great and glorious day, faith in Christ is all that matters. Help us to be humble, to grow in our faith, and to always bow before the Lord in humility, emulating our Lord Jesus Christ and professing our faith in Him. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.