

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 19, 2020

Psalm 119:57-64 (NIV) ⁵⁷You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words. ⁵⁸I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. ⁵⁹I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. ⁶⁰I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands. ⁶¹Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law. ⁶²At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws. ⁶³I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. ⁶⁴The earth is filled with your love, O LORD; teach me your decrees.

Isaiah 44:6-8 (NIV) "This is what the LORD says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. ⁷Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come. ⁸Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

Romans 8:18-27 (NIV) ¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet

have, we wait for it patiently. ²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (NIV) ²⁴Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸"An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹"No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

³⁶Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

The Judgment of the Kingdom

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

- ❑ **Why weeds?** (verse 36; Genesis 3:17-18; Romans 8:20-22; Revelation 19:15; Matthew 3:10-12; 11:3)

- ❑ **The kingdom of heaven** (verse 24)

- ❑ **The sons of the kingdom: *the righteous***
(verse 37-38, 43; Romans 3:22-24; Galatians 3:26)

- ❑ **The sons of the evil one: *all who do evil***
(verses 25, 28-30, 38b-39; 41b; Revelation 12:7)

- ❑ **The judgment** (verses 39b-42; Colossians 1:13; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9)

- ❑ **The everlasting kingdom** (verse 43)

The Judgment of the Kingdom

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Anyone who enjoys vegetable gardening, as I do, as I said last week, knows that an abundant harvest is not guaranteed, but weeds are!

Last spring, I had trouble with some of the seeds I planted in my garden. They just wouldn't sprout and grow. I waited and watered, but nothing happened. I had to plant some seeds two and three times. But I never had trouble getting the weeds to grow!

They would sprout up right where I planted good seed. And sometimes, when the sprouts first came up, it was hard to distinguish which were the vegetables or herbs I had planted, and which were the weeds!

Today we look at what Jesus' disciples called, *the parable of the weeds*.

In verse 36 of our Gospel lesson this morning we are told: *His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."*

If you have ever fought a battle with weeds, you have probably wondered, why did God create weeds? The short answer is, He didn't. But that answer needs some context. Weeds are a corruption of God's original design.

Genesis 3:17-18 tell us that weeds are a result of humanity's fall from grace into sin when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

¹⁷To Adam he said, "Because you . . . ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you . . . (NIV)

Weeds are a reminder of sin—that we live in a world that has been corrupted from God's original design.

The lesson from Romans 8:20-22, which was read earlier, tells us: *²⁰For the creation was subjected to*

frustration [futility], not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

But the parable really isn't about weeds; it's about the presence of evil in this world.

This parable answers the question, if Jesus is truly the Messiah, and if the kingdom of heaven has come in Jesus, why is there still evil in the world?

Why does God not root out all evil?

The disciples were anxious to understand this as well. What about the weeds? That was the question they wanted Jesus to answer. The problem of evil was a burning question for the disciples, and it is a burning question for many, many people today. In fact, it is probably the number one reason people use to justify not believing in God.

I'm often asked that question of why does God allow evil? I heard it just this week with tears flowing from the inmate who asked: Why did God allow the evil that I grew up with in my family? Why did God allow me to mess up so badly? Why didn't God stop me? Why must my kids suffer for what I've done?

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to suddenly appear and immediately destroy all the enemies of God and reign over the whole earth in righteousness and justice. He would vanquish all evil.

Revelation 19:15 gives us a picture of what they were expecting: *From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.* (NASB)

John the Baptist also painted a vivid picture of what the Messiah was expected to do in Matthew 3:10-12. ¹⁰*The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. . . . ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

But even John the Baptist, as he languished in Herod's dungeon, had serious doubts about Jesus. He sent messengers to ask Jesus: "*Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?*" (Matthew 11:3).

As I said last week, each of the parables is a corrective to various misconceptions about the Messiah and the Kingdom of God.

People did not *understand* the message of the kingdom because they could not get past their preconceived ideas. Jesus spoke in parables to circumvent those mental blocks that kept people from seeing and knowing what the kingdom of God was really about, and what the long-looked-for Messiah would actually do and accomplish.

Jesus used this parable to correct their thinking about

The kingdom of heaven (verse 24)

²⁴*Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.*

We must first understand what Jesus meant by the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is wherever God is and rules with His power and grace.

The whole universe is God's kingdom in the sense that the whole universe is under his control and authority,

and since God rules over it with omnipotent power. (This is called the kingdom of power.)

But in Jesus Christ the kingdom has come to us by grace.

Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's prayer, *Your Kingdom come, Your will be done!*

Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: "The kingdom of God comes to us when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His Holy Word, and live a godly life here on earth and in heaven forever.

Our catechism says the kingdom of God is the kingdom of grace in which God rules in the hearts and lives of believers and which one day will become the kingdom of glory in heaven where those who are saved are with Christ in perfect happiness forever.

By the saving power of the gospel, as the Holy Spirit calls us to repentance, and faith in Jesus, we come under the benevolent rule of God and become

The sons of the kingdom: the righteous

³⁷He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom.

Bible scholar Richard Lenski makes an important linguistic and historical point: Jesus did not "use [the Greek word] *tekna*, 'children' but *uioi*, 'sons,' which . . . always involves a legal right, the right of inheritance."

In ancient Rome and Israel, only the sons had the right of inheritance, and so Jesus uses "sons" for *all* believers, both male and female, to denote this full legal right as adopted heirs of the King!

In verse 43, these believers are called the righteous.

⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. . . .

We do not have a righteousness of our own. Our righteousness is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:22-24 the apostle Paul proclaims: *²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

That is the heart of the gospel—the good news of the kingdom—which saves us and declares us righteous in God's sight.

Verse 43 of our Gospel lesson also says the righteous are *in the kingdom of their Father*.

We have God as our father through faith in Jesus Christ as we are told in Galatians 3:26. *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (NIV).*

Jesus then reveals the identity of the weeds. They are

The sons of the evil one: all who do evil

³⁸. . . The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

In verse 41, we are told that the weeds are

. . . everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

Verse 28 says, *an enemy did this*. All evil in the world is a result of the enemy of God whom Jesus called the evil one, the devil. The devil rejected the worship of God and led a rebellion (Rev. 12:7 calls it a *war in heaven*) taking a third of the angels with him. Satan's fall was the prelude to the fall of humanity.

Why does God allow evil in the world? Or why did God create the devil? Occasionally I get asked that question.

This simple answer is God created all rational beings with a choice. The angels were created to be able to choose between freely worshipping God and entering into His eternal joy, or rejecting God, and glory in

themselves. Lucifer, which means the light bearer, was, as far as we know, the most beautiful and magnificent of all of God's created beings. He chose to glory in himself—and became Satan, which means the accuser, and the devil, which means deceiver.

Adam and Eve were also given a choice: to eat from the tree of life and live eternally in glorious fellowship with God, or to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and, in the serpents words, *"be like God, knowing good and evil."* Mankind choose to know evil—and so we experience evil in this world because of that choice.

The devil chose to be the enemy of God, and the enemy of all that God made. He has sown the seeds of evil in this world.

Verse 25 says that . . . *his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.*

We need to know that these were not simply garden-variety weeds. The specific term used refers to a type of rye grass that is related to the wheat plant, and is virtually indistinguishable with wheat in its early growth. The Hebrew people considered it a degenerate form of wheat.

The fruit of these weeds were inedible and somewhat poisonous. If not separated at the harvest, they would ruin the entire wheat crop.

We are told in verse 28 that the immediate response of the land owner's servants was *'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'*

We often react swiftly and harshly when we see evil in others. We have a much harder time seeing the evil in ourselves.

²⁹*"No," he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in*

bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

The problem with evil is that it is entangled with the good. For God to root out all evil in this world, would mean to tear out what He planted—redeemed—for good.

We had a flower bed on one side the of the parsonage when we lived in Illinois that didn't get much attention. I loved the Irises that would bloom every spring, but the whole bed was dominated by crab grass and assorted weeds. Late one summer I decided to pull all the weeds out. But the roots were so entangled with the flower bulbs, that I just had to pull everything up and start all over.

We are told in verse 41 that this evil includes *everything that causes sin* as well as *all who do evil*. The word translated here as *everything that causes sin* is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as a stumbling block, or a temptation to sin. As children of God's kingdom, we can be drawn into sin by stumbling blocks or temptations and get entangled with evil. That also is a work of our enemy, the devil.

To punish evil, God would have to punish us—instead He took the punishment upon Himself.

Instead of rooting up evil, He destroyed the power of it. One day evil will be no more—everything that causes sin and the evil one, will be thrown into the lake of fire.

God will not let evil continue forever. There will come a day when God will do some weeding. There will come

The judgment

The title of this message is, the judgement of the kingdom. It is God's final answer to the evil in this world. Jesus said,

³⁹ . . . *The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of*

Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We must not minimize the horrors of hell. Jesus certainly didn't. Six times in the gospel of Matthew Jesus warns of a judgment *where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*

Richard Lenski poignantly wrote: It is a "doom so intolerable that the Son of God came down from heaven and tasted all the bitterness of death that he might deliver us from ever knowing the . . . anguish . . . in these terrible words: 'there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.'"

Jesus is our primary source about the reality of hell. It was precisely because Jesus knew its terrors that he came to suffer its punishment in our place, to rescue us *from the dominion of darkness*, (Colossians 1:13 NIV) to redeems us, so that we might live forever in His *kingdom of light*.

Scripture tells us that God is patient towards us and does not want *anyone to perish but all to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9)

God never intended people to inhabit hell—Jesus said it was *prepared for the devil and his angels* (Matthew 25:41).

The devil knows his destiny and is determined to drag as many as possible with him to his doom—*away from the presence of the Lord*.

Perhaps the most terrifying passage of the Bible comes from 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. ⁶*God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with*

everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (NIV)

Those who want to shut God out of their lives will receive their wish for eternity.

Finally, Jesus ends this teaching with the promise of

The everlasting kingdom

⁴³*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

This week I watched a spectacular sunset from our apartment. For most of that day the sky has been clear, but early in the evening clouds rolled in obscuring the sun. A light rain began to fall. But as I looked across the water of the Puget Sound to the horizon, I could see a narrow band of blue sky, with only a few wispy clouds. I knew about 9:00 the sun would reappear with breathtaking brilliance. I was not disappointed.

In a dazzling display of splendor, the setting sun poured brilliant light through our front picture windows, filling the apartment with overwhelming radiance. The walls blazed red from its intense luminescence. I had to shield my eyes. Outside, the rain was still falling but everything was bathed in a fiery glow.

I had asked the Lord earlier that evening for a vivid picture to help me understand, and then to explain this final verse; and now I was experiencing it!

Jesus said, *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

He who has ears, let him hear.

Let us pray,

Benediction: The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26 ESV)