

Written Copy: Matthew 13:26-30 "Christ's Reign-Hidden Yet Powerful"

Proper 11-7th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, July 19th, 2020

Text: Matthew 13:26-30

²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Exegetical Statement

Jesus continues to teach all those who are following Him, both His disciples that believe Him to be Messiah and the followers who are a mix of undecided to hostile against Him. He uses parables to teach the hidden truths about the reign of God that has come to earth in Him. Here He teaches that in the world His the believers-those who are the product of the healthy seed of His Word grow and exist alongside of those who are the product of the devil's seed: of lies and sinfulness, those who refuse to abide by God's Laws and work to cause believers to fall from faith. It is not the job of the Church to separate the unbelievers from the midst of the believers. In the visible Church there are both weeds and wheat. Christ promises a coming day when He will commission His angels to do the final sorting of those who will inherit eternal life from those whose works will earn them eternal death. Until then the Church is encouraged to be patient. We are to know that despite how things may look within the visible church and without that Christ is indeed reigning in the hearts and minds of men, and He is reigning over all things even though it doesn't look like it. All will be made clear and known on the Last Day when His reign and rule will banish all those who serve the works of the devil against His Church and His kingdom will stand unopposed and encompass all reality.

Focus Statement:

The true reign of Christ in the world is often hidden. But He promises He is at work and promises a Last Day harvest that will remove all evil from our midst and restore around us and in us the restored perfection of the original creation. Even now He is at work within us planting His Gospel seed through the work of the Church and using that same seed to keep us in faith despite the evil that exists around us. Through that same Gospel He keeps our hope alive for this final day through His gift of faith.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We, the Church can become disheartened with the evil that is allowed to exist around us and sometimes crops up in our midst. We doubt that Christ is truly reigning when in the world it appears that He is being thwarted.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Through our participation in the Means of Grace by faith we trust that Christ is still ruling and at work preparing His Church for the Last Day Harvest. We share the Gospel with all not judging worthiness and trust that will provide the final cleansing of all evil on the Last Day. We may not know who will be gathered in as wheat on the Last Day, but we trust that He does.

Subject Sentence: Christ is reigning despite the evil around us

Introduction: The Reign of Evil Around Us

Has anyone ever posed this question to you: “How can you say that God is real? How can you believe in a God of love who allows such terrible things to exist in this world? If He really does exist why then is there racial injustice, civil unrest, COVID-19, and a general sense of intolerance among people? Why didn’t he prevent George Floyd from dying, or make that police officer remove his knee? Where is He as rioting continues? Where is He as COVID-19 takes the lives of innocent people? If all this is happening on God’s watch, then He must not be as powerful as you think. He must not be able to stop these things from happening.

As the Church we do confess that Christ is reigning over all things at the right hand of the Father. We do believe He has the power and means to stop any and all evil from happening or continuing. And yet, as is evident in our world today, He does not. We pray for an end to racial injustice and yet it continues. We pray for an end to the violent protests, and yet they continue. We pray that He will put an end to COVID-19, and yet it continues and infection is once again on the rise, infecting both those outside of the Church as well as believers.

While you and I may never go so far as to question God’s existence, perhaps there are times when we question His grip on things as evil flourishes around us. When evil hits home within our family and loved ones in the form of sickness, divorce, death, we may begin to question His promises of love and care for us. We begin to think that He doesn’t love us in the same way He does others whose lives are free from these problems. With evil reigning around us in so many ways we can begin to lose hope, and our faith that Christ is in control can begin to falter. This can cause us to lose sight of who we are as His Church and what we are called to do in the midst of all this. We wonder: “Where are you Jesus?”

Jesus Parable: The Hidden Reign of Christ

Jesus disciples were having the same kind of struggle. As I mentioned last Sunday, they’ve been witness to Jesus teaching with authority, and doing miraculous things that could only God Himself could do. While many are following after Him, there is a lack in the kind of commitment to Him that the disciples have. The crowds are following Him as He was long as He heals their diseases and cast out their demons. As long as He puts the religious leaders in their place. But they are not ready to accept Him as the Messiah he came to be, not a military leader, but one who has come to save them from an even worse enemy than Rome. And as he fails to meet their job description, like the Pharisees already have, they will turn against Him.

Jesus used the Parable of the Sower last week to explain that not all people will believe in Him. And the difference is not in the power of His Spirit working through the Gospel Message, but in the hearts of mankind. Many with sin hardened hearts will refuse to believe. But those whose hearts have been softened by the Law and healed by the Gospel, these will believe, not from any choice they could make, but only by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. Work that is most certainly going on even though we cannot see it. Now Jesus puts before the people and His disciples the Parable of Weeds to explain the hidden reality of His kingdom.

He tells the story of a farmer who plants a crop of wheat in his field. He uses good seed that will produce a good healthy crop that will sustain the life of his family and others. But when all on the farm are asleep, an enemy sneaks in and sows a different kind of seed on top of where the farmer scattered his good seed. The seed of this enemy will grow not wheat, but weeds. These are weeds that will look like wheat until the time comes for the wheat to sprout and begin producing grain. These weeds do not have the power to produce any useful fruit. They are a waste of soil and a waste of space.

The farmhands come to the farmer alarmed at what has sprung up in the field. They realize these weeds are taking up valuable space and nourishment. They seek permission to go in and pull up all the weeds. Now any smart farmer would tell them to go ahead. "Clear those weeds out of there so they don't choke off the wheat and steal valuable nourishment from them. But surprisingly, the farmer in Jesus story responds to the farmhands request saying: "Absolutely not! Leave them be. In pulling up the weeds, since they were planted so close beside the wheat, your pulling them up may damage the wheat as well. Leave them be to grow side by side. When the harvest day comes, I'll take care of the problem. I will instruct my harvesters to gather up the weeds first, bind them, and throw them into the fiery furnace to be consumed."

This decision by the farmer would stand out in Jesus' story. It's not something most farmers would do. They would be willing to sacrifice some of the wheat just so the rest can grow and be healthy. But not this farmer. Jesus is making the point that His kingdom operates differently than people would expect. In His kingdom, even as He has come to establish His reign and rule, He allows evil to remain as well. He even at times allows evil to flourish. His kingdom doesn't look as they expect it to, and His reign and rule doesn't conform to their standards, or ours. His way of ruling is often hidden from our eyes. We expect Him to remove evil things and evil people and He does not. He allows them to exist side by side with us, His Church. This is the message he gives to all those following Him, even His enemies the Pharisees.

Later, alone with His disciples, He gives them the key to understanding this parable. The devil is the one who sows the seed that produces useless and fruitless weeds. These are people who prefer lawlessness over obedience. Not just lawlessness regarding the law of the land, but refusal to obey and live by God's laws. They would rather create and live by

their own laws, laws that emphasize me and those I love first. The devil is also the motivation behind those who seek to corrupt the Church. Those who seek to change the Gospel Message from by grace through faith in Jesus Christ to faith in Jesus plus-whatever else. Those who teach that God's laws no longer apply since Jesus message is one of love and toleration for all people and all lifestyles. These are people who work inside and outside the Church to pull you away from your faith in Christ alone.

But He has an additional message for His disciples. While evil things are allowed to happen, and evil people are allowed to live and flourish beside His Church now, this will not be the case forever. He calls His Church to be patient, for a day of leveling and justice is coming. That day is Harvest Day, also known as Judgment Day: The Last Day. It's the day Christ will return in all His glory. He will send His angels out into all the world. They will gather up all those who are faithless weeds. They will not have time to repent. They will not have opportunity to plead their case. That time is past. They are bound by God's law which, because of their continued disobedience, declares them worthy of eternal death. And they will be cast into the fiery furnace that is Eternal Death-the Lake of fire. Jesus describes this as a place where there will be weeping: the kind of weeping that comes from bitter grief, the kind of grief that no man has experienced nor would want to. It is the place of gnashing of teeth: the physical reaction to severe anguish that is physical, emotional, and spiritual. It's physical, emotional, and spiritual torment for the devil, his demons, and all who die without faith. And it lasts forever.

Our Hope and Promise

But Jesus has a different message for them and for us. That day of Harvest will bring for all those who believe in Him a very different future. His angels will lovingly gather us into His arms. And our future will be to spend an eternity safely in His presence, sharing the glory that is His alone which He will give to all who die in faith towards Him

It's not what we deserve or earn, but the free gift we receive. On our own we could never be the healthy wheat that produce good grain. We are sinful and selfish just like the weeds that will burn forever. But Christ came to redeem us from their fate. His suffering, death, and resurrection are what make us good healthy wheat. On the cross He took from us all the evil that makes us like the weeds and gives to us His pure obedient goodness. He gives that to you by faith. Because of your faith in Jesus, the Father sees you not as disobedient lawbreakers, but as His precious children who love Him and desire to obey Him. We receive the inheritance that Christ earned for us and gives to us: Eternal Life.

For now, we live and minister in a world where our Reigning King allows evil to exist side by side with us. But He at work right now preparing us for this awesome future. Paul in his Epistle describes our life on this earth as being one of groaning in the midst of suffering. That's because the field- the world in which we live- is also groaning. It has been cursed because of our sin. It can no longer do the job it was created to do: be the perfect garden

that supports life everlasting. But Jesus is working on redeeming all those planted in this fallen world. He is working in their hearts. His Spirit is breaking up the soil of their hearts and planting the good seed of the Gospel. He is redeeming His fallen creation one heart at a time: one soul at a time. And he does this through you and I, His Church. We live as the fruit of His Gospel, proclaiming His grace, love, forgiveness, and mercy through what we say and what we do. When this redeeming of souls has been accomplished, according to God's will and plan, then the end of this fallen broken Creation will come. Its groaning will cease. Christ Himself will create a new heaven and new earth. He will create for His Church the Garden of Eden once again-Creation restored to its original perfection.

This work that is going on now is hidden; Jesus' Spirit working in the hearts and minds of mankind. Christ's reign and rule is ongoing in this world; it's just hidden from view. He allows evil to work in order to create times of groaning for the unbelieving world. To impress upon those who see themselves as self-sufficient that this view is not reality. He uses the works of evil to break hardened hearts so His Spirit can heal them with the Gospel. And He uses the same works of evil to keep us always turned toward Him, trusting in Him. Clinging to Him as our Rock and fortress, the only God that can save us.

Conclusion: Living as the Church Side by Side with Evil

So we live out our lives in this fallen world doing the job Christ has given the Church. What is that job and what is it not? It's not our job to root out all evil in the world. It's our job to solve all the problems of injustice in the world. It's not our job to stop all the civil unrest. It's not our job to stop COVID-19. Christ tells us these types of things will exist alongside us throughout our time in this world. And all these will be totally removed on Harvest Day-the Last Day. Until then we proclaim His Gospel Message. We live out His love and forgiveness through word and action. We work as His tools to change hearts and minds from within. And we allow His Spirit to work in us to keep us in faith despite the evil that seems to be thriving around us

Remember that Christ's reign and rule is hidden. He rules in our hearts by the power of His Spirit working through the Gospel. He is at work in the hearts of those around us. He is at work reigning in this fallen world even though at times it doesn't look like it. He doesn't do things the way that we would. He doesn't remove the evil but allows it to exist side by side with us for His own purposes. Yet those whom we regard as evil now may actually be gathered in with us on that Harvest Day, through the hidden yet powerful work that is Christ reigning and ruling in their lives.

COVID-19, racial injustice, and civil unrest exist not out of His control but under His control. They are part of His hidden agenda that is not always made clear to us. But we, by faith, place our hope and trust in His power, His might, and His love. We know by faith that He is reigning in our hearts and lives. We trust by faith that He has a firm grip on the world. We groan even as Creation groans, always looking for how we can serve as His Church today, awaiting the perfect tomorrow that is yet to come. Amen.