

Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost July 19, 2026 jj
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Conflict shouldn't belong in the church, in your family, or for that matter, in our world at all. But it's there. You have probably known most of your life that it is not particularly "safe" to be a member of the Christian church. Martin Luther would often plead with his hearers to pray for anyone who was just baptized. Why? Simply because that new child of God, whether baby or grownup, even though it was just rescued from eternal death and damnation through the saving flood, nevertheless one born of water and the Spirit has just at the same time also become the bitter enemy of the Prince of Darkness. And since the devil directs his fiercest energy against those who are most resistant to him, the church can be properly identified as the Evil One's battlefield of choice. This is where Martin Luther is often quoted, "Where God builds a church, Satan pitches a tent to frustrate and attack it." That presence of conflict as simply a fact of life we can understand, but where today's parable from Matthew's collection in chapter 13 hits us unexpected, is that God wants this conflict to continue. Only at the end, will He administer His perfect justice! The weeds can stay, and even grow stronger, until then. What sense does that make??

As Jesus explains on His own, not to the crowds but to His closest followers, not out in the open lakeside beach but inside the close quarters of the house, He is the sower of good seed. Not necessarily morally good, but good in the sense that it will yield wheat instead of weeds at harvest time. The wheat does not grow by itself. In the first sower parable we heard last week, the seed was the Word. Here Jesus says it means the sons of

the kingdom, that is, those who will receive eternal life because of God's grace and forgiveness that is delivered to you through the Word. You do not plant yourself in the Christian Church, nor did any of your decisions bring you eternal life; God has lovingly brought you to this time and place, using other faithful Christian people among your family and friends. The Word is sown when you hear it and are baptized, then God waters it and makes it grow as He desires through more preaching of the Word and receiving Holy Communion. The Church, especially the worship service, is the place and time in which God does all of this work on your heart.

And then the enemy does his sowing. And he's nothing but an evil, nasty copy-cat. He can't go to his own field; there's no such thing. All that the devil can do is destroy what God has already made, and that is exactly what he does. Notice, however, the shrewdness of Satan. He bides his time, waiting for the right moment. He doesn't march right out in broad daylight and plant the weeds of his evil sons among the wheat. No, he waits for everyone to be sleeping. He does his dirty deed at night. When God's people are not watchful, when they may be stuck in the good-ol' days when times were better, remembering and trying to recreate the time when churches were more prosperous and numerous, daydreaming that society can get along if Christians just lighten up and stop being so strict. That's the time when the devil perceives the guard to be down. That's the opportunity he takes to sow the weeds.

And they aren't necessarily ugly weeds. At least not at first. At the very beginning, these dandel weeds, or tares, look just like wheat when they sprout. Only the experienced farmer's eye can tell the difference at a glance. The difference becomes much greater toward the end at harvest time. The wheat becomes useful, healthy food, while the dandel heads prove to be toxic and dangerous. So, likewise, the sons of the Evil One that are among you in this world are not necessarily the obvious ones: you know, the kind of crowd that make their rebellion quite clear. Actually, the weeds that look like wheat are different: they're pretty good, decent people. They are often loving, considerate, all the stuff that you'd expect to come from a Christian. They might even go to church, but the whole time instead of listening to the Word of God, they're nodding along with what the pastor preaches against all those "other sinners out there, not me." They're the ones who like to take a comforting Gospel doctrine like Sanctification, and twist it into a chance to demonstrate their moral superiority in how much better they follow the Law than others. On the other end of it, evil weeds disguised as wheat would just as likely take the blessed truth of salvation by God's grace without works and then use it to justify their own evil, self-indulgent lifestyle, saying, "Christ died for my sins, so I'm going to have some fun," of course when no one else in the church is watching. Such are the weeds that Satan has planted among you in this world, and even a church with purely orthodox teaching and worship can still have a mixed field of weeds and wheat. In fact, that almost guarantees it.

And so if you aren't offended by the hypocrites that you see around you (including that hypocrite who looks back at you in the mirror, I might add), then you hear this parable of Jesus and plead for balance. Since God wants wheat and weeds to grow together until harvest, why should we insist on all those doctrinal details and instead do more of the stuff that brings more people in and makes the church some more money? People don't come back if you tell them that the good stuff they do doesn't count anything toward their salvation. Why try to point out errors that good Christian denominations teach, when under God's will as this parable says, we are allowed to co-exist in this world? The pastors and laymen who push that the Bible is the only truth, and the ones who maintain that certain practices and worship styles in the church either teach the truth well or distract from it, they're the ones causing all this trouble and unrest today. Why can't we have peace and prosperity like we used to have?

I guess you could say that in a certain way, all of these things are ultimately God's fault: He's the one who says like the sower, let both grow together until the harvest. The weeds, as harmful as they are even right now, should not be uprooted. No violent cleansing or mass excommunications of false believers will be tolerated in the sight of your heavenly Father. The church must never get into the business of purging itself. If it does, then it is playing right into the hands of the Enemy. Why can't we get rid of those who oppose the truth? Why doesn't God tell His servants to rip out the dandel weeds in the field?

Why? Because He is concerned for the wheat. He could bring His awesome judgment to bear anytime He pleases, but He

doesn't. He wants your salvation to remain intact. The Lord Jesus who paid for your forgiveness—indeed who set the whole world free from sin by His suffering, the shedding of His Blood, and His death on the cross—He knows that you are weak without Him. He is fully aware that, although you are His precious wheat, you still do many weed-like deeds. He wants to spare you from being uprooted when the terror of the coming judgment is unleashed. The dandel weeds have an unfair advantage. Their roots are stronger and they're more spread-out. If you pull them up, those roots will latch on to the wheat and rip it out too. Your heavenly Father does not want that to happen even to one wheat plant—even one true Christian scooped away as collateral damage, or friendly fire, is too much. The prophet once asked: "But who may abide the day of His coming?" and if Judgment Day were to come any sooner than it's supposed to, the answer would have been a deafening silence. No one would survive. So until then, weeds and wheat wait together until the harvest, and then they are separated.

I must hasten to add at this point, that when God advises you to let the wheat and weeds grow together, that He does not say to His servants, "Go sow more weeds in the field to make it fair and balanced." The Lord of the Church does not want false teaching to be promoted, any more than He would want you to let your guard down. God wants the wheat to prevail by casting more of His pure, good seed into the field—by the survival of solid, truthful preaching, along with tried-and-true worship practices that support it—but not by getting rid of the bad that's already there. If you must excommunicate, do it not to get rid of somebody, do it as Matthew 18 directs, to give a firm but loving reminder that to

refuse to repent is to put their soul in danger. It's always done carefully, as a last resort, and always, always with the hope that the excommunicated person will be reinstated.

So with the devil mounting both a head-on attack and an undercover subterfuge, what's the Christian to do? How can you know for certain whether you're a weed or wheat? Even though Jesus doesn't use this particular parable to answer that question out right, consider how calm the farmer is in the story. God does not like that there are false Christians mixed in and among His true children, but He's not overly excited about it. His wrath against the devil and his sort is holding off until the end, but the sons of the kingdom are going to make it when all is said and done. The seal of God's promise was made sure for you when Jesus rose victoriously from the dead. That meant that His blood price for your soul was all that was needed to save you from death. Rather than worry about the weeds that may be around you, stick with that which made you wheat in the first place: pay attention to the Word of God that is planted within you as you hear it. Pray, using that same Word of God to speak back to Him, recalling His promises toward you. This way, you are prepared against both tactics of the devil. Though for now, it may not be all that "safe" to be a baptized member of the Christian church, to be wheat among the weeds, remember that the harvest is coming. Because of Jesus, your one and only Savior, you will look forward not only to escaping the gnashing of teeth, but you will also enjoy the gifts of heaven, resurrection and new creation that you have the opportunity to taste right here at this altar.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.