

Time after Pentecost JULY 19 2020 Worship at Home Lect A

Good morning – welcome to worship at home with our service of word & prayer for JULY 19 2020.

I am Maureen Rueckwald a long-time volunteer at St. John’s Lutheran Church.

I hope you are able to gather everyone in your household together this morning. If you are not alone - assign parts of this beforehand. If you don’t have a Bible you can google the scripture readings and print them out too. Perhaps print out copies of this for everyone present. This Liturgy is from the ELW book. Prayers are from Sundays & Seasons.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Sit in the quiet for a bit – take some deep breaths. Light a candle.

The Gathering

Call to Worship

Call to the Lord, who hears our prayers.
Wait for the Lord, the source of our hope.
Sing to the Lord, who delights in our songs.
Let us worship.

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The first Hymn today is from ELW 597 or LBW 294: My hope is Built on Nothing Less

The Prayer of the Day – let us pray

Faithful and most merciful God, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

The WORD

Please stop this video and read the scriptures at your own speed and I will read the gospel lesson for today:

Isaiah 44:6-8 Psalm 86:11-17 Romans 8: 12-15 Matthew 13:24-20,36-43

Our homily today is written and delivered by **REV. KATHY MARTIN WHO SERVES AS THE ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP FOR MISSIONAL RENEWAL IN THE SYNOD OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.**

Jesus put before the crowd another parable. "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.

For a few weeks this summer, Matthew's gospel takes us down by the sea where a huge crowd has gathered. It is so large that the only way Jesus can continue to be seen and heard is to push back from the shore in a boat. From there he presents, in rapid succession, one curious story after another, inviting those listening into a place of thoughtful, imaginative reflection on the nature of life in the kingdom of heaven.

Listen! A sower went out to sow.....

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,
like yeast, like treasure hidden in a field,
like a merchant in search of fine pearls,

like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind...

...all these stories and parables including the one we have before us today about weeds in a wheat field.

It is an interesting parable to read in the midst of a global pandemic when the weeds in our world, in ourselves, are ever so obvious everywhere. Spending a lot of time and energy trying to discover how they got there seems a lot less important than trying to figure out what to do now that they have appeared.

As with all of his parables, Jesus starts his story with a situation from everyday life that his audience would have recognized immediately. A farmer sows good seed in a field but at night an enemy, a rival, enters and scatters seeds for weeds. In time, those working in the field discover the weeds and come to the landowner to point out the problem. "Did you not sow good seed in your field?" "Where, then, did these weeds come from?" The farmer's reply is brief "an enemy has done this."

What now? What is the best way to handle this situation? The workers offer to take on the job. Their plan is to head straight into the wheat field and begin pulling weeds. It sounds like a reasonable approach. However, pulling weeds is rarely as straightforward as it seems.

The weed Jesus is talking about is something called darnel or 'false wheat' as it was known. It is a rye grass that looks almost identical to wheat through most of its development but when it matures, the seed it produces is poisonous. It

is risky to remove since this weed often wraps its roots around those of the grain and hastily plucking out one might mean the end of the other. The problem with the worker's approach is that some of the weeds the workers pull out might be grain and some of the "wheat" they leave in, may later turn out to be weeds. There is no way to easily tell until the plants are mature.

The farmer tells his workers to leave the field alone, to let the wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest. It may sound as though the farmer is favouring the weeds over the wheat, but this is not the case. Out of an abundance of caution and in the hope that all the wheat will survive, the farmer decides that patience is the best option.

It is not Jesus' intent to tell us we are to ignore the evil in this world and do nothing about it. There is a time and place to take action but the point of the parable is that we are not to do so when it is difficult to tell whether something is evil, a weed and contrary to the gospel or simply a bit of wheat that we do not recognize yet.

The church has been wrong enough times in these situations of trying to determine what is wheat and what is weed, that we need to exercise a fair bit of caution before we judge or uproot things we think don't belong. I think of the church's involvement in unbelievable things in the past like witch burning or crusades, in our treatment of the LGTBQIA+ community, or... well I'm sure if you take a few moments it won't take you long to add to the list. Attempts to weed out those we think don't belong can have horrible consequences for generations.

Barbara Brown Taylor says in her sermon on this text, "Sometimes it is mighty hard to tell the difference between a good plant and a bad one especially when it can act both ways. I suppose we have all had the experience of uprooting the raspberries by mistake or protecting something interesting that turns out to be a thistle. I don't know what makes us think we are any smarter about ourselves or about the other people in our lives. We are so quick to judge, as if we were sure we knew the difference between wheat and weeds, good seed and bad, but that is seldom the case. Turn us loose with our machetes and there is no telling what we will chop down and what we will spare. Meaning to be good servants, we go out to do battle with the weeds and end up standing in a pile of wheat"¹

Weeds and wheat, I didn't expect to see this parable come to life during the global pandemic. Think back with me for a minute to the anxiety and pace of those first few weeks of COVID-19 here in Canada. Businesses were closing, grocery shelves were emptying and no one was sure what the future was going to hold. Some of us were fortunate to have employment that allowed us to work from home but many people lost their income when their place of business or their children's schools closed. There was a palatable sense of panic as people wondered how they would pay their rent and other bills or buy groceries. Employment Insurance would not work for most and many people needed the help right away.

¹ 1 Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew*.

Almost overnight, government leaders and staff set aside party politics and worked together to create the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or CERB. You may recognize it more by the numbers. It is the \$2000/month program for people who had to stop working for reasons related directly to COVID-19. One of the things that makes it so unusual and controversial is the government's decision to use what I would call a "wheat and weeds" approach to this program.

You see, to ensure people could receive their payment quickly the application is on the "honour" system. Rather than a lengthy interview process and numerous verifications, CERB is paid to anyone who states that they qualify simply by applying. There is almost no screening so nearly every application receives approval.

You may remember, almost immediately, people were upset. There were many questions about the lack of scrutiny and financial controls for this mixed field of applicants "What about those are not really eligible but end up getting the money anyway?" "How will you root out the falsified applications?" "What kind of punishment will there be for those who take advantage of the system?"

Patently, calmly and in a way that made it evident that they had already considered most of these questions, our government indicated that they had decided to err on the side of grace. They would trust that in time things would be sorted out. What was needed most now was to ensure that those who needed the funding would have it, and have it quickly...and that no one in need would be missed.

I never imagined there would be a day that I would compare the actions of our politicians to the wise, gracious and patient farmer in this parable. Our story is not a perfect fit but it is close enough. It is a glimpse of the way God is at work in our world, in the places and the people where we least expect God to be. This parable might sound like judgement but it is really all about grace and the incredible patience of God made known to us most fully in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Our hymn of the day is # ELW 681 or LBW 362: We Plow the Fields and Scatter

The Prayers of the people are led today by Shelley Gauthier

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION JULY 19

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

God of the harvest, you sow the good seed of the gospel of Jesus Christ into your field. Help your church throughout the world to be both diligent and patient, full of resolve and gentleness, that our witness may be faithful to your intentions. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all space and time, your whole creation groans in labor pains, awaiting the gift of new birth. Renew the earth, sky, and sea, so that all your creation experiences freedom from the bondage of decay. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of the nations, teach us your ways, that we may walk in your truth. Mend the fabric of the human family, now torn apart by our fearful and warring ways. Guide us by your mercy, grace, and steadfast love. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of hope, you accompany those who suffer and are near to the broken-hearted. Open our hearts to your children who are lonely and abandoned, who

feel trapped by despair, and all who suffer in any way *especially those we name before you*. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God of the seasons, in the midst of summer, give us refreshment, renewal, and new opportunities. We pray for the safety of those who travel. We pray for those who cannot take the rest they need. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

God of life, those who have died in you shine like the sun in your endless kingdom. We remember with thanksgiving the saints of all times and places and saints close to us. Gather us with them on the day of salvation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**.

Join me in saying the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Our sending hymn is HYMN LBW 563 or ELW 679 For the Fruit of all Creation

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,

The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,

The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. God cares for YOU! **Thanks be to God.**