

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, July 27, 2021
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Wheat and Tares”

READING: Matthew 13:24-30 – Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 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?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let 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 first sermon I ever preached was on the text I just read. I was the A.C.E. (Administrator of Christian Education) at Trinity Lutheran Church, Darmstadt, Indiana. I was in my second year there as principal of the school and assistant to the pastor. Our pastor had just accepted a call to another congregation, and we were vacant. The elders asked me if I would be willing to conduct one of the non-Communion services each month until we got a new pastor. I had agreed. So, here I was, my first attempt at preaching the Word.

I was much relieved when I looked up the texts for that Sunday and discovered that the Gospel lesson was Jesus’ parable of “The Wheat and the Tares”. Being a Michigan farm boy and having participated in numerous wheat plantings and wheat harvests, I understood the parable from a practical viewpoint. Nearly every year, a few weeks before the wheat was ready to be harvested (usually in mid-July), pretty purple flowers would suddenly appear in patches in one or two places in a field of wheat. These were thistles, and my father had a particular antipathy toward thistles that he passed down to me. Thistles may look like pretty flowers to you city-dwellers, but when they go to seed, they spread and grow and use up the ground depriving the crops of water and nutrients.

As in Jesus’ parable my father did not send us into the wheat fields to pull up or dig up the thistles’ roots. That would have resulted in the destruction of large amounts of grain. That had to wait for after the harvest when the whole patch could be attacked. All he had us do was to cut off those pretty purple flowers and put them in a bread bag. Those flower heads would then be burned in the trash to keep them from going to seed and spreading.

In his parable Jesus teaches that often it is hard to tell the Christian from the non-Christian. There are people who go through the motions of the Faith without every really having faith. They hold membership in the congregation. They come to worship now and again. They make a few offerings. They say nice things about the pastor. They may even hold offices in the congregation for a while. They appear to be very similar to the rest of the members.

On the other hand there are those who seem to be outside the Good Shepherd’s fold. They hardly ever show themselves in the Lord’s house – maybe for a funeral now and again, maybe an Easter service a couple of years ago. They grouse about the pastors and their salaries. They second-guess decisions the Voters or the Council makes. They don’t seem to have much “Jesus” in them. These might be good candidates to remove from the rolls as inactives.

Yet, Jesus says it is not our job to make judgements about who is and who isn’t worthy of the name “Christian.” He warns that by “throwing out” those we might think unworthy we may cause harm to those

who are close to them. We may cause one of the weak ones to fall away because of our judgements. We may “pull up the wheat with the tares.” Jesus says he’ll take care of the sorting out at the Last Day. He knows the hearts of all people, so his judgements will be perfect and just.

As a pastor of long years now I can also tell you that on a regular basis some of those “inactives” suddenly and unexpectedly become very active. Things happen in their lives that lead them back to the Lord and to his house. They “wake-up” to the void in their lives and realize they have slid a long way from the Lord’s side. There’s always a special joy that comes from seeing one of those “lost sheep” being led by the Spirit back to the fold.

They’re about done with the wheat harvest in the homelands of Michigan. Those big combines they use have sieves and fanning mills built in them that do a very good job of separating the wheat from all the other foreign things that get picked up by the machine as it rolls over the fields. It sorts out most of the little stones, the weed seeds, the bugs, and all the dust that finds its way down into the wheat’s seed heads. In the hopper you’ll see all those bushels of wheat that will be gathered into the barns or grain elevators.

Jesus reminds us that the day will come when he, too, will gather up his beloved ones and bring them home to his Kingdom. On that day, too, the hypocrite and the unbeliever will receive his judgement. He will sort out the wheat from the tares. How we pray that hearts we cannot fathom will be found to have the love of Christ in them, that they along with us may be found in his “harvest-home.” Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

1) Our celebration of Pastor Woods’ 25th Anniversary of his Ordination is planned for August 22 in late service and in the dinner to follow the service. Watch for details coming to you on a postcard this week. Be sure to respond to it. What a blessing he has been to us!

2) Pastor Woods and Trish will make a trip to Alaska the last week of this month and the first week of August. Keep them in your prayers.