**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (Parable of the Weeds) July 19, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of Matthew the 13th chapter here re-reading these words. “So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he said, No lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I was a child I would sit down on the floor or at the table and play board games with my brothers and my parents. One game I remember well from when I was younger was the game of Clue. Clue was a murder mystery game, where you had to figure out which one of the many characters committed a murder. You also had to find out where they did it, and with what weapon. The game was intriguing because you got to collect evidence, and eventually expose the real killer. While this was a kid’s board game, it still dealt with exposing the bad from the good. It was a mystery that had to be solved. The mystery genre is a very fascinating aspect of our culture. Mystery dramas where we find out who committed a crime are popular today in various entertainment mediums and especially on television. Mystery novels have always been a popular form of book. We all seem to enjoy figuring out “who did it”. We even see some mystery in the Bible. Jesus himself was a mystery to many, it was widely speculated just who He was and why He came. He even at one point asks His disciples who others say that He was, and they give a myriad of different answers from Elijah, to John the Baptist, to just simply another prophet. The Pharisees had great debates about how Jesus could do the things He was doing. There were mysteries concerning the proper interpretation of dreams at the time of Joseph and Daniel. And in parables there is a mystery of interpretation, in figuring out who is who, and what is what in these teaching moments. In our Gospel lesson for today, in the parable of the weeds, the servants of the sower are seeking out the weeds among the wheat. They are wondering, if it is their place to root out the bad from the good.

If last week’s Gospel lesson was all about the seed, this week’s parable from Matthew 13 is all about the harvest. Like the parable of the sower, at the beginning of the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus tells them a parable about a sower who sows good seed in his field. It sounds the same as our parable from last week, but this time we see that his enemy comes and sows weeds among the wheat, so that when they start to sprout, it is difficult to tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds. So there is a great dilemma. How do we deal with the weeds? How do we stop them from spreading? This is a part of the mystery of this parable, but what the servants ask is very telling to the attitude that some take, to this parable’s interpretation. They ask the Master, the one who had sowed the good seed in His field, if He wants them to go out and gather the weeds. They are simply wondering whose job it is to clean up the mess of the enemy who came and sowed seeds of destruction.

Now there lies the mystery. If the seed is of course the Word of God as we talked about last week in the parable of the sower, and this world is the field that it grows….and if this world is therefore filled with wheat and weeds that are similar in appearance until the harvest, how do we distinguish the wheat, from the weeds? After all, if this congregation is a field as Christ describes here in this parable, then there are those who we would consider wheat, and there are those who we would consider, weeds. There are wolves in sheep clothing among us. There are those who are here not to hear the Word of God and receive God’s Holy Sacraments worthily but instead are sons and daughters of destruction, byproducts of our sinful world, and evidence of the evil that is all around us. So there’s the mystery: Which ones are wheat, and which ones are weeds…Like a mystery novel or television show, or even the scene played out in the upper room before Jesus is betrayed, you may be tempted to look around at your fellow members gathered here today and wonder about the person sitting next to you, are they wheat? Or weeds? Or better yet, ask yourself that question. Is it me? Am I a weed?

The servants ask a very honest question, one that we too may have wondered when it comes to dealing with our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. “Do you want us to go and gather them?” Otherwise saying, “God, do you want us to weed out the sinners from among us?” Do you want us to expose the lies and the sinful lives of those around us in order that we can live in a field that is filled only with wheat and not any weeds? It seems like a worthy and worthwhile undertaking. After all the Church of God is made up of believers and His children, not sinners right?

Yet, if we were to weed out all of the sinners from the congregation, and keep only the good wheat that is firmly rooted in Christ’s Word, who would remain? Who would still be able to sit in this Sanctuary? We are living in the midst of a “cancel culture” in our world today. If we were to put it into the context of this parable it would be to say that if you look even remotely like a weed, then you are uprooted and burned. Once a weed, always a weed. There is no forgiveness, reconciliation, rehabilitation, or place for those who have past indiscretions that have been exposed publicly. Even the accusation is a guilty verdict in our world today, of sponsors and corporations you don’t want to be associated with someone who even could remotely resemble a weed. There is no room for them. Burn them. Destroy them. Cancel them. Get rid of them. Even if it’s found out after the fact that they were in fact wheat and were falsely accused, it’s too late. The court of public opinion has ruled: weed. Looked like a weed, burned like a weed. End of story.

But whose job truly is it to decide between wheat and weeds? That’s where we get into trouble, when we overstep the bounds that God has established and the work that He has called us to do. The truth is, we are all wheat and weeds. Saint and sinner. Redeemed children of God, bought and redeemed with Jesus Christ’s holy blood shed for us when He died on the cross, and fallen children of evil, covered with the grime of our sinfulness and judged by the standard of perfection that the Law demands. If God were to judge us based upon our own actions, we would be the ones who would be weeded out of the congregation. We would be the ones, bundled up and thrown in the fire. All of us! We would be the ones outside of redemption because we had not lived the perfect lives that God demands of us. Instead of being the ones going out and exposing the sins of others, we would be exposed for the sinners we are.

Weeds must be destroyed. They can’t simply be pushed to the side because the wind will still allow them to spread and defile other fields and hurt other wheat. Weeds must be burned and turned to ash so that they will not affect the field ever again. And that judgment of the weeds is coming. Do not think that just because the sower allows for the weeds to grow with the wheat until the harvest that He will not destroy them in the end. Sadly that’s the way that some interpret this parable. They see this as an example that God does not mind the weeds and the sin that has corrupted our world. But make no mistake, a judgment is coming. A judgment of fire and destruction. Where the weeds will be bundled up and thrown into everlasting torment. Where those who live in their sin and their imperfection will be judged and delivered to everlasting death. The wrath is there. Our God is all powerful and does not tolerate sin in anyway.

But this parable should not bring us sadness or alarm, because as I said in the beginning, the parable of the weeds is all about the harvest. Not a harvest that will lead to our death and destruction, but a harvest that will find us brought into the safety and security of God’s barn, and our heavenly home for all eternity. The fact that God is patient and allows the weeds to grow with the wheat, shows His love and compassion to those whom He has called to be His children. It shows His patience and love to those who have fallen away from His grace, and His almighty love for the seed to continue to work on their heart and call them back to faith. His patience is our redemption. His patience, shows His love. His patience allowed for Noah and His family to be saved from the destruction of the flood. His patience with us led to God showing mercy to generation after generation who passed down the promise of a Savior. And even after Christ came and died to take away the sins of the entire world, we still see God’s patience for the unrepentant of this world. For we are still here. The seed continues to go out and work and call those who are children of destruction to be children of the light. The light of God. The light of Jesus Christ.

It’s amazing to see the picture that Jesus gives us of how salvation is found in these two parables the past few weeks. For the seed sprouts into wheat, and the wheat is then harvested by the reapers. The wheat does nothing to grow itself or sow itself. The wheat does not harvest itself and place itself into the barn. The wheat simply receives the gift of life in the seed, it grows, and then it is taken to the barn when it is harvested. So it is for all those who are called by God to faith in His Word. So it is with all those who have come and are born again in the waters of Holy Baptism. For the seed of God’s Word took root and has begun to grow. Faith has been created. When the harvest comes, whether it be months and years from now, or even before this sermon ends, You will be brought in the safety of God’s barn, with the rest of God’s children, His holy harvest, not on account of your own worthiness or anything that you have done to earn salvation for yourself, but solely by the grace of our patient Heavenly Father, and the work of His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

The mystery of this parable is not who are the wheat and who are the weeds. And the truth is God is not calling us to go out and weed out the sinners of this congregation or any other Church. We cannot destroy sin or change the sinful fallen nature of this world because we are the ones who are sinful and unclean. And the harvest will reveal the wheat from the weeds in the end. No the mystery of this parable, is how God could be so patient with His fallen creation, to wait until the harvest to reap the wheat and burn the weeds. The mystery is how God could love us even after we had fallen away from His perfection and holiness. God’s patience is a mystery but God’s patience shows His love. And the harvest will reveal the truth. Until then may we go out and spread the seed of God’s Word, knowing that the evil one will always work in his evil way, but also knowing that the seed is powerful and effective, and that God causes it to grow and harvests it when the time is right. May God bless You, in His Word as we wait until the harvest, not in peril or dread, not in fear or trembling, but echoing the final words of the Holy Scriptures, at the end of the book of Revelation. “Amen, Come Lord Jesus!”

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.