

Pastor John H. Schober II

Date: 10/22/25

Church day: Wednesday of Trinity XVIII

Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36b-43; (II Corinthians 6: 11-16a)

Location: St. Peter's Lutheran Church

The Kingdom of Heaven: Now & Later

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord; who, on the great and final day, will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. We look forward to that day where the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Amen.

Next Friday is Reformation day, where we commemorate God working through Luther to bring the Church's eyes back on salvation by grace through faith in Christ, alone. For some though it is just Halloween, a time to celebrate the harvest season with costumes and candy. While preparing for this sermon, an old taffy candy came to my mind: Now and Later. They are called "Now and Laters" because, as their slogan goes, they are "Hard 'N Fruity now and Soft 'N Chewy Later." So my mind goes "AH! The kingdom of heaven is like a Now and Later!" Thanks be to God that Jesus comes up with the parables and not me. However, today's Gospel, the parable of the wheat and the tares, does bring out the tension of what is seen now in life versus what God promises will happen later.

Today, we stand with the disciples, looking out over a field that looks... messy. We see wheat, but we also see tares, weeds. We see faithfulness that has grown from the seed of the Sower, Jesus Christ proclaiming His Word. Although only a fraction of it sprouts, the rest was snatched, scorched, or choked; what does grow produces up to a hundred-fold fruit. At the same time grows weeds, tares, AKA bastard wheat. An appropriate name for faithlessness and fruitlessness; for those who do not have God as their heavenly father. But the kingdom of heaven

is at hand! That is, God is reestablishing His reign over His fallen creation through Jesus of Nazareth. With this parable and explanation, Jesus answers the question:

WHAT DOES THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN MEAN,
BOTH NOW AND LATER,
(II) FOR THE DISCIPLES, AND (III) FOR US?

First, some context: Starting back in chapter 11 of Matthew's Gospel we hear that John the Baptist is in prison (11:2) and the kingdom of heaven is being violently attacked (11:12). Cities where Jesus had performed mighty works rejected Him and refused to repent (11:20). The Pharisees, on multiple occasions, have pushed back and turned on Christ (12:1ff). Jesus even shows that His blood relatives are against Him; His true family is His disciples—those who do the will of His Father (12:16ff).

I

In such a context, dark clouds are gathering, and trouble is on the rise; the disciples need Jesus to steady them—to assure them that God is reigning and that to follow Jesus is the good and right thing to do. Jesus uses this parable to do just that, to comfort and assure them, as He often does.

Things are a mess and will continue to be. The Lord opens the parable saying “**The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but... his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat...**” (24). And then He provides the explanation: He Himself, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the sower, the good seed is His Word and the wheat is the faithful that follow Him. The enemy is the devil and the tares, the weeds, are his followers—those who reject Christ as the Messiah. The field is the world. The good seed and the wicked seed are sown so closely, they are practically on top of each other, their roots intertwined. The disciples see this happening around them. They are with Jesus; they are following Him in trust and obedience, albeit often falteringly. They see the Pharisees turning on Jesus, they hear the crowds

murmur in unbelief, they even entertain doubts themselves. Unbeknownst to them, right in their midst the bastard wheat grows: Judas, the betrayer.

We see that their concerns are the same as the servants in the parable. As they travel with Jesus, they ask if a Samaritan village that rejects Jesus should be smited and *Jesus rebuked them* (Luke 9:54f). With this in mind, Jesus continues His parable: **“The servants said to [the sower], ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest...’”** (28-30a). Smiting that village could very well take out faithful believers. Yes, it looks bad now and it will be for some time. Jesus knows this and He wants His disciples to know this. Even after this parable things will go from bad to worse: Jesus will be rejected in His home town of Nazareth. John the Baptist will be beheaded. Eventually, Judas will betray and Jesus will make His way to the cross. The disciples will be scattered. Even after the resurrection, although the Christ’s word will spread, the wheat and weeds will continue to grow. Many of the disciples will be martyred. These things must be.

Jesus encourages His disciples to take heart and reassures them that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, God is reigning and has plan: Jesus continues: **“At the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn’”** (30b). Christ then explains that this is the day of Judgment, of His return to judge the living and the dead. Although it looks bad now for the disciples it will all be put right later. The tares will be gathered and burned—the wicked people that the disciples faced will be assembled and judged. The disciples who were granted faith and strengthened to endure to the end will also be gathered, but taken into the eternal kingdom of God—the new creation, just like the wheat gathered and cherished by the sower.

II

So what does this mean in our context? Well... it's just the same as the disciples. Dark clouds are gathering, and trouble is on the rise; WE need Jesus to steady us—to assure us that God is reigning and that to follow Jesus is the good and right thing to do. The wheat and the tares are still growing together. It still looks bad now, but we faithfully look forward to the later of Chrst's return.

We see how the mess continues now. Besides the growing love affair people have with their possessions and wealth, there is the growing challenge of godless and evil ideologies and false beliefs that seek to unravel God's created order for sexuality, the family, and marriage—the very fabric of our society through which God continues to provide and curate our world. And what is even more concerning perhaps is that these ideologies are believed and embraced by more and more people. The tares seem to be overgrowing the whole field!

There are also the tares growing right in the midst of the Church: false and misleading teaching, causing confusion, heterodox spiritual movements that may look healthy and helpful at first glance, but which turn out to be heresies that ultimately lead us away from Christ and his work. Pastor Conradt wonderfully pointed out that heresy is a cancer and must be cut out last week. But wait... the man told his servants to NOT rip out the tares in the parable. How do we deal with this dissonance? Ultimately, this parable is a reminder that we should not be surprised when the weeds sprout up around us; when unbelievers appear in intimate places—in our families, our communities, and even our churches. Luther puts it this way: *“From the very fact that you discover factions and disunity among you, you can tell that God gave to you the true Word and knowledge of Christ. For when you were under the pope, Satan certainly left you in peace.... But now that the true seed of God's Word is with you, he cannot bear it; he must sow his seed there*

*too...*¹ Simply, this parable does not speak to church discipline or even conversion. Matthew 18 takes up that task and goes over the steps of dealing with sin. Patience and trust is the key point in this parable.

While it looks bad now and will only continue to get worse before it gets better, it **WILL** get better later for the day of the Lord will certainly come. We must be patient and trust in the Lord and pray for His return. We look towards the same return as the disciples did. We give thanks that the seed of faith was planted in us by the Son of Man, our savior. We rejoice that our faith is nurtured and grown by His Word and Sacraments. The righteousness of the Son that shines forth was given to you in the waters of Holy Baptism, as your sins were washed away. Christ purchased and won you on the cross, forgives your sins, and gives you His body and blood in His Holy Supper. Our Lord promises to return in His good time to gather us all into the new heavens and new earth to life ever lasting. We have the promise now to strengthen us as we await the later. The hope remains; that Day is coming. It will be the Son of Man's day and His angels will do the sorting. God may seem slow, but he is never late. The parable of the tares and its interpretation encourages us, gives us hope, and stands us on our feet so that we may continue to follow the Son of Man and to serve Him.

Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing,
She wakes, she rises from her gloom.
For her Lord comes down all-glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;
Her star is ris'n, her light is come.
Now come, Thou Blessèd One,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son,
Hail! Hosanna! We enter all The wedding hall
To eat the Supper at Thy call.

In the name of the Father and of the Son ✚ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ LW 35:49

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ
Jesus. Amen.