

Sermon Text for August 4, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Leviticus 19:17-18, Matthew 13:24-30 *“The wheat and the weeds”*

I’ve noticed that I have had a lot more conversations with many of you recently regarding judgments on people. I think it is just the flavor of the day, and maybe it has always been the case but I am just noticing it now, that people want to talk about how they understand and how they lay judgment on people and their situations. In our culture recently the Olympics have produced a real firestorm of people not even hesitating to cast judgment based on partial or incomplete, often even false information. But once it is out there people feel the need to chime in and express what they think which is often based upon no knowledge of the situation.

Politics has always been at the center of people expressing their opinions and casting judgment. Each candidate and each side of the aisle constantly expressing false information about their rival and the state of things in life and in this country. It is very, very rare to find someone who doesn’t have an opinion and who isn’t willing to share it when it comes to politics. Just this week I had a conversation with a visitor to the church and I said to them if you are looking for a church that takes sides on politics then this is not the church for you, and I am not the pastor for you. But we still almost consider it a sport in casting judgment in the field of politics equipped only with no or wrong information.

It takes work to plan a seed of disinformation and to stoke lies so that they become for some people the truth, even though all evidence points to the contrary. It takes a lot less work to believe it and to go along with the false judgment that people are willing so readily to cast and believe. Today we have a parable of Jesus, which basically means a story with a meaning, where he gives us a strategy on how to deal with evil, or for some of us we can think of it this way. How do we deal with people that we disagree with, some would use the word hate although you know I never would use that word because both Jesus and the Old Testament tells us that we have to live our lives without hate. Let’s read.

READ – SHOW THE PICTURE

This past time when we went to Israel we were able to visit the valley of Elah. Every group that I take to Israel I insist that we stop at the valley of Elah, that is where David met Goliath and for me personally it has meaning and it is incredibly inspiring. This last time that we went in the valley there was wheat that was planted and every now and then you could see plants that we clearly sticking up above the wheat. We asked the guide and he said, well, it is harvest

time. Because those are the tares, or the weeds. They don't pop up like that until it is time to harvest the wheat. Then it is easy to identify the wheat and the weeds and gather up the weeds and burn them.

The weeds were identifiable only at the time of the harvest and it was only at harvest time when the weeds were dealt with. We find this parable that Jesus gives to his disciples just like the other one that we saw, explained later on in vs.36-43. Let's read that for an explanation of the parable. Jesus is the sower in this parable who sows the good seed. In Greek the term for good seed is kalon sperma. Remember last week, we were the sowers, that's why you raised your hand last week. This week, Jesus is the one who sowed the seed. The field where the seed is sown is the world. The good seed are the followers of Jesus and the bad seed are the followers of the evil one, of satan, of the devil.

It is fascinating to me that the devil is hard at work within the field, among the children of God, planting the bad seed so that the weeds will grow along with the wheat for months, even for years. They share the same space, they are seen as the same sort of people. I was amazed this past week when the prisoner swap took place that there was one Russian family who was a part of the swap, that we gave back to Russia, who had children who had no idea that they were Russian. They were so embedded in the Argentinian society and culture that their children did not even know that they were spies.

The final piece we find are the angels which are described as the reapers and the ones who separate the wheat from the weeds and burn the weeds and bring the wheat into the house of the Father. So that is the parable and often it is seen as a parable about judgment day and it is seen often as a parable that delineates and separates the good from the bad, the evil from the righteous.

But the more I read this parable the more I realize that this is actually a parable of grace, and not of judgment. First of all it is a lesson to us that we should never, ever try to separate those who will enter the kingdom and those who will not. It is not up to us, we cannot make that decision, as much as we would like to try, that is God's job. In the meantime we are called to be patient with each other. This parable of grace tells us that who knows, the seeds that may have been planted by Satan could actually one day turn into wheat if you just give it enough time, if you surround them with enough people who are willing and able to nurture and provide a family and a home. That's the job of the church. Each one of us is a weed, we have all fallen short of the glory of God, but only through the grace of God are we able to produce anything that

resembles something useful such as wheat. Do not consider yourself better than you are, but also do not consider anyone worse than they are.

Jesus creates his church with the seed that he plants. And how do we know that we are good seed? How do we know that? What happened when God created us and made us from the mud? What did he say that we were? Very good. Yes, it is in the midst of us being good that the enemy works. This is a message of patient tolerance and leaving to God the settling of scores. Some of us may not want to hear that because vengeance is a part of our DNA, or settling the scores, or holding a grudge. Those are all weeds that are planted by Satan. We are called to wait on God's judgment, we are not the gatekeepers to heaven or hell.

So while God plants the good seed, the devil is hard at work. The devil isn't lazy, he got up in the middle of the night in this parable and worked hard to plant bad seed. After he planted he goes away. The devil always goes away, that is a clear difference between the devil and Jesus. He goes away and leaves us to fend for ourselves which we are never able to do, fend for ourselves that is.

But unfortunately the roots of the weeds can be stronger and deeper than the roots of the wheat or the good produce. Why are harmful weeds able to establish themselves better than other plants? That is a question for today as well. Why are lies more easily believed than the truth? Because it is easier to believe lies especially if we want the lies to be true. And they grow like weeds. What can this bad seed look like that is planted among us? It is the opposite of good seed. Good seed tells us we should not take vengeance. Good seed tells us we should love our enemies. Bad seed produces that which is not of God. The bad seed and the resulting weeds are not a part of a natural process. It is the result of a deliberate attempt to ruin the work of the Master. Someone worked hard to plant these bad seeds according to this parable, and also according to the life that we experience.

The simple words of Leviticus help us to see that Jesus' words of grace in this parable, that we are to delay judgment and allow God to make the call, fit neatly into a plan that God has for all of our lives. Calvin tells us to treat all people as if they are children of God. Do we do that? Leviticus tells us not to bear a grudge, to love our neighbor. Jesus requires us to do the same.

Today, we will celebrate communion together. The beauty of communion at this church is that this is not an exclusive club for only those who are in. No, the field is wide and the seed has been cast far. This table is open to all people who are seeking to become followers of Jesus

Christ. The table is a sign of a delayed judgment which makes it clear that this is a parable of grace.

When we come to the table it is the great equalizer. All are welcome regardless of how many years you have been walking with us in this family. Maybe this is your first Sunday, you are welcome. Maybe you have been here for generations, you are welcome. We all receive the same bread and the same juice whether we are new at this or we have been here for decades. We all find ourselves in season in our life when we are more like the weeds than we are the wheat. This table bring us together and allows the Holy Spirit to work in us converting our weediness to good seed, the seed that God has originally planted within us. Amen.