19 July 2020 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 7 Vienna, VA

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"Is God Good?"
Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8:18-27

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

If God is good and all powerful, why is the evil in the world?

That is a question asked by many, and asked down through the ages. And for some, the existence of evil is all the proof they need to know that God does not exist. That He is a myth. Wishful thinking. A delusion for weak people. Or if He does exist, that He's not worth the time, for He must be either not good to let evil go on, or not very powerful if evil remains. So that's that.

Except . . . Jesus gives another answer today to consider. Not that He owes us any answers! But Jesus is telling us today that there is evil in the world **because God is both good and merciful.**

That's the meaning of the Parable of the Weeds of the Field that Jesus tells us today. Last week, a man went out to sow his seed, and he sowed it lavishly and abundantly. Good seed, for good plants, to produce a good harvest. But, turns out, he wasn't the only one sowing seed. Another man came, after him, under the cover of night, in the darkness, and sowed bad seed. Seed intended to produce nothing - only to hurt and harm what the good sower sowed. This one sowed evil.

So, after the seeds sprouted and grew, the servants noticed all was not right. At first they thought the good sower had sowed bad seed - or at least, a mixture of good and bad. But no, the good sower does only good. Nothing wrong with his seed. An enemy did this. To undermine good. To hurt and to harm. There was no other purpose than that. Just evil. Pure evil.

Well, there's an easy way to take care of that! Let us get rid of all those weeds, the servants said! Pull 'em up! We'll take care of that problem quickly and easily. We're ready - just give the word . . .

Now, before going on, a word here about this quickness and eagerness. It's not always good. The saying: *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread* is not without merit. Sophomores are "*wise fools"* who after just a year of learning think they know more than

they really do. New pastors are often eager to go in and "fix" their congregations. But sometimes quickness and over-eagerness can cause great harm. And with regard to theology, a man named G.K. Chesterton once said that heterodoxy is always in a hurry, gotta do it now! But orthodoxy is patient, and awaits God's time. So the servants are eager, but that's not the best course of action here . . .

Their master, the good sower, knows more than they. So no, he says. Leave them. Don't rush in. Why? For the sake of the good plants. To be good and merciful to them, lest while ripping out the weeds, the good get harmed in the process. The time will come, but it is not yet.

Now, that's easy to understand when it comes to plants! But perhaps not so much when it comes to *us*. Because it sure does seem like this world would be a much better place if we could just get rid of *them* . . . those evil ones . . . you know who I mean.

But maybe we're being sophomores, "wise fools," with such thinking. Maybe we don't know as much as we think. We sang in the Introit today, ***Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.*** We need to be taught. The ways of God, the goodness of God, the mercy of God. That we may walk in it. That if He says it is good and merciful and *better* for the evil to remain, then as much as we might not understand it, *it is* - good and merciful and better. Teach me, O Lord. To understand that. To think like you.

And while we'll never fully get there, thinking the thoughts of God, in this world and life, with our bodies, minds, and hearts infected and affected and dragged down by sin, **teach us He does**, with His Word. And in Holy Baptism, too, where your Father in heaven has given you His Spirit that you may not only be His child, but that you also have the mind of Christ, that you begin to think like Christ, and grow in Him.

For the truth is that our life in this world is intertwined not just with believers and Christians, but with those who are not Christian, those who are not believers, and those who perhaps even work evil. So if all those not of good seed were to go, *how would you be hurt?* You don't even know all the ways, since God is able to use the just and the unjust, believers and unbelievers, for His good. In every vocation in this world and life, there are those of good and bad seed, and yet in fulfilling their vocation, God is using them for good for you. Farmers, police, firefighters, shop keepers, soldiers, government workers, and more. How do they benefit you? So if they were all pulled now . . .

Now, there are difficulties that come with that, to be sure. Struggles in our world between right and wrong, between those who follow God's Word and truth and those who do not. Evil isn't idle. There will be conflict and pain and heartache. Pontius Pilate was part of a government that provided peace in the world, yet also crucified Jesus.

And this, too: it is not always so easy to tell the difference between the weeds and the

wheat, and judging too quickly could cause great harm.

For think about **Paul** - he looked like a weed for a long time, persecuting Christians and sending them to prison. Would you have pulled Paul?

Or what about **Judas**? He looked like a good plant for three years. He was one of the twelve! He preached and taught, helped to hand out food to the 5,000. Would you have left him?

Or what about **you**? Take a look at youself, your past, your worst moments. When you hurt someone, when you held a grudge and refused to forgive, when you did what you knew was wrong, when you weren't living as a Christian. What if "the weed police" pulled you right then and there! But they didn't. God didn't allow it. **Because God is good and merciful.** *To you!*

Because the truth is, we've been plopped down in the middle of a long story, a long history, and we just don't know the whole story. We know the here and now, and maybe a bit of history, but there's a lot we don't know, and we certainly don't know the future. So how do we judge? How do we decide?

So, a little story I once read: A sculptor was once asked how he managed to take a block of stone and create beautiful pieces of art - something I certainly could never do! He said: *Well, I don't. I just cut off all that doesn't belong, that isn't part of the finished piece*. He sees what cannot be seen by others.

That's how it is with God. We may want to rush in and start hacking away at the stone, start pulling the weeds, start doing what we think - but all we're going to end up with is a mess. We just don't know. We just can't see as God sees.

So our Father in heaven says, *be patient*. Live with the weeds for a while, because you can't really tell the weeds and wheat apart anyway. The time will come for the harvest, and *then* the separation will take place, then you'll see. But not before then. *Now* is the time of patience and mercy, and yes, struggle. But in the midst of the struggle, a promise - from God through the apostle Paul: ***the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*** Right now, Paul says, are the labor pains. It's tough. It's probably good that none of us remember that struggle of being born! But your delivery is coming. Your new life is coming. A new world, a new creation is coming, that you cannot even begin to imagine! So be patient right now, but in hope, in faith in God, and so also in love toward your neighbor.

And with this, we learn of God's plan. That God doesn't conquer evil by destroying evildoers. **He destroys evil with forgiveness.** Conquering evil by destroying evildoers is like pulling weeds without getting the roots - they're just going to grow back again. But

forgiveness goes down to the roots, and not only conquers evil, but even has the power to change bad seed into good seed, and weeds into wheat. And again, we see and learn of God's goodness and mercy.

The goodness and mercy of a God who *doesn't* just sit up in heaven as an observer to what is happening in our world but unable to do anything about it, nor as a judgmental God who just sits up in heaven zapping evildoers and squashing evil under an all-powerful fist. He is a God who in goodness and mercy came down into the midst of our evil world, to be swallowed up by evil, that He might swallow it up with the might of His atonement. With the might of His death and resurrection. With the might of His forgiveness. And He did. And He *is*. That's the only reason why you're here. The blood of Jesus, shed on the cross and poured into the ground for you, to forgive your sin and evil - all of it! Past, present, and future - and make you a good plant. *His* plant.

And the blood of Jesus that continues to nourish you each day, through His Word, through His forgiveness, and through His Body and Blood that you receive here at this altar. There is no question that you and I, based on the merits, deserve to be pulled. But a good and merciful God **said no**. Wait. Be patient. Let them grow. Let me feed them, care for them, nurture them. And so you are who you are. **Because God is merciful**.

But He is merciful to *all*, and so now bids us to wait and be patient. The harvest is coming, but there is still time. And God, in His goodness and mercy, is working. In you, for you, through you. He gives you His Spirit who ***help us,*** Paul says. Who helps us wait and pray. Who helps us see as our Father in heaven sees. Who helps us to love and forgive as Jesus does. And to be merciful. To all. For we simply do not know what the whole story is, all that God is doing. So we do according to His Word, in faith, in hope, and in love. And trusting that He knows what we do not. And that in the end, all will be right and just.

Because God *is* merciful. That there is evil in the world proves *that*, not that He is weak or does not exist. And so we come to His Table, this Table *set before us is the presence of our enemies* (Psalm 23), to receive Him. And we may groan with creation for a while, under struggles and burdens and cares, and maybe things are going to get *really* tough. That's okay. God is merciful. To you and to all. Lord, help us hear that and learn that. Help us see that. Help us believe that. That Your faith and hope, Your love and forgiveness, be not just in our hearts, but on our lips, and in our deeds. And help us rejoice in You even now, even in the midst of the struggle, even surrounded by evil, knowing that we will also rejoice with You in Your kingdom.

For it really is true, what we just sang - *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. . . . And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, the vict'ry has been won, the Kingdom our remaineth* (LSB #656). The kingdom of our good and powerful and *merciful* God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.