

PENTECOST 6, A – July 19, 2020
SCRIPTURES – Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 8:18-27; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.” Matt. 13:24

You know, I’ve heard this parable of Jesus many times. I’ve preached on it a number of times. But, a few days ago, something struck me. Jesus says that He is going to talk about the kingdom of heaven, about how things are with God and how He acts – **“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to,”** He begins – but He then proceeds to talk about how things are on among us on earth: **“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.”** How differently does Jesus see things! We think of heaven as up above, and of God as watching us, and watching over us, from on high... from a distance; another realm, even. Jesus speaks of God as down here, living and working among us and for us. He is not far away at all, but is right here!

And everything that you see... and everything that you are and have... is His. Our whole world, and all that we know: it is simply God’s field, which He owns and uses for His own purposes.

Now, this realization brings some uncomfortable realizations with it. This world and our lives are filled with many bad things. We’ve been dealing with them in abundance this year. Especially difficult to see of late has been bad people and the harmful things they have done and are doing. In fact, it is especially them that Jesus has in mind in His parable. **“The weeds are the sons of the evil one,”** He says as He explains the parable. Well, if our good and powerful God is actually present among us and working among us... why is this? **“An enemy has done this,”** Jesus says. He warns that God is not the only one who is present and active among us. The devil is also present and very active. He raises up many people to do his evil work, to corrupt and pollute God’s world.

Again, we might wonder, why? How can this be? Well, don’t look too far. Jesus hints at the answer when He says in His parable, **“while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.”** God uses us to plant the field of His world with people who believe in Him and love Him. He uses us to tend them, to love and help and support one another and so stimulate and encourage growth... faith. Have you been doing so, or have you been sleeping?

- You know, we have much more farming knowledge and ability in our day than people did in Jesus’ day. We know about rotating crops. We irrigate and apply pesticides. We don’t just leave the growth of our crops up to God, but we use the wisdom He has given us to tend them.

In many ways it’s the same with the crop of faith. We believers today have so many more blessings than did people in Jesus’ day. Bibles are inexpensive, and we all own

them. We can read God's words ourselves. We can listen to them in our cars, and as we jog or walk. We have many excellent Bible helps: commentaries with background information; books to help us find verses; devotional guides to comfort and guide us. The people Jesus lived among had none of these. So: do you use the Bible, and Bible resources, to plant and nourish faith in Christ in yourself, and others? Our enemy the devil isn't relaxing. He is busy planting unbelief and false belief and does much damage while we sleep and snore. We cannot blame God for all of the bad things and godless people among us. We're to blame!

But, again, pay attention to what Jesus says. God Himself isn't sleeping. He may seem at times to be distant and unconcerned, but He is not. Jesus tells us that He sees and knows what is going on in the world, His field. He doesn't just sow His crop and then go away, as the devil does. No, our Lord sees and knows... and more. He also plans what is best for His crop. His plans may not always seem right to you – how can He let the weeds grow and not pull them out? – but when you don't understand God's ways, remember that He loved you so much that He became human for you. For you He felt in His own mind and flesh the attacks and taunts of evil people. Jesus felt so deeply your own doubts of God's presence and concern and help that He cried out on the cross, ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** He bore all of your sins and God's punishment of them in His body, mind, and soul and let them consume Him in death so that you might be forgiven and cleansed, live in God's love, and love and trust Him. Such a God and Savior will never be unconcerned and apart from you, His planting! And so, the apostle Paul assures us that, even though we ***“groan inwardly [and] wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies [and] hope for what we do not see,”*** we do not groan and wait and hope alone. ***“The Spirit helps us in our weakness,”*** Paul says (Rom. 8). And when things seem hopeless, when ***“we do not know what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*** The Holy Spirit, who is one with Jesus and God the Father, dwells within you and prays for you! Such is the closeness, the oneness we have with God through Jesus. We are not forgotten, left out of His plan for the field, His world. We are the focus of His plan!

Like a good farmer, God has the harvest of His crop in mind. He directs everything toward the day when ***“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”*** We have so much to look forward to!! Our world itself will be changed. St. Paul tells us in Rom. 8: ***“the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”*** Although we cannot in this life know all that this means, it certainly means this: that, when Jesus returns in glory, this world will continue on. For, heaven and God's presence are not up above, but are here! But, life will be greatly changed. No longer will the enemy be present to sow evil people and cause much strife in God's world. Only God's planting, His people, will be present; and they will be ***“shining like the sun,”*** Jesus says; shining with the glory of the Son of God. This world itself will also be changed, and will itself reflect this glory.

That is not now. Now, both the wheat and the weeds grow together. We must endure much sin and evil in this life. This is God's will. But, do not fear. Do not be weighed down by worry, or by the evil deeds and faithless words of those who do not believe. No, take to heart what your Lord says through His servant Isaiah:

"I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me... Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

In the name of Jesus, the true God, the Rock of our salvation. Amen.