**Year A – Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Matthew 13:24-30,36-43**

**August 6, 2017**

We Are Wheat among Weeds

1. We come from a different source (Vv24-25)
2. We live side-by-side in the field with the weeds (vv 26-29)
3. We have a different destiny (v30)

Introduction

What is your destiny? That’s a popular question that people sometimes ask themselves. Some people say, “I was destined for this profession.” Perhaps someone who is good at math would consider himself destined to be an engineer. Someone who likes kids and is well spoken might feel destined to be a teacher. Someone who enjoys studying the human body might feel destined to be a doctor or a nurse.

Others say, “I was destined to meet this person and marry this person.” “Our sports team is a team of destiny—we were destined to win the championship this year.” “I know I have a destiny—I just need to find it!”

Human perceptions of destiny are just like any other human philosophy—stained by sin and far from perfect. The woman who felt destined to meet a certain man is devastated when that so-called man of destiny leaves her. The college student who thought he found his destiny in a certain major is disappointed when that major of destiny doesn’t have a job available for him. The sports team who thinks they are destined for success loses a heartbreaker in the playoffs. Maybe we humans can’t be as sure of our destinies on earth as we think we are!

But there is one destiny we believers all share, friends, and it’s completely true. You can bank on it. And that is our eternal destiny. In heaven with Jesus. In our short lives on earth it may seem as though that destiny is so far away, that the unbelieving world is winning, that we as God’s people are so much weaker and less successful than them. And Jesus can sympathize with that frustration. So today he brings us a parable for our comfort, the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Let’s dive into Jesus’ words again today.

Setting the scene

The Christian church has historically followed a three-year rotation of readings, called the lectionary. It is a time-tested way of giving God’s people insight into all the important doctrines of Scripture. It also is a way of pointing less towards specific preaching topics or styles of the pastor and more towards the whole treasure of Scripture, especially the saving message of Christ.

And so if you come to hear God’s Word every Sunday, Sunday in and Sunday out, you will receive a well-rounded view of all of Scripture. Our pride and self-righteousness will be humbled with plenty of law-heavy Scripture texts and sermons, and our trust in Christ will be strengthened with plenty of gospel-heavy texts and sermons.

And right now in the lectionary we are in the midst of a series of readings that focus on the parables of Jesus. And what is the definition of “parable” that you have learned in Sunday School? “An earthly story with a heavenly truth.” Jesus spoke in these illustrations to explain to people in very simple fashion what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Last week he spoke of seeds being scattered on different soils. He ended by speaking of the seed that landed on the good soil, and yielded a large crop. That refers to the people who hear God’s Word, love it, and strengthen their faith regularly through Word and Sacrament. May that always be us.

In today’s section, he gets into difficulties that even the most mature plants, even the most mature Christians face.

Part 1: Coming from a different source (Vv24-25)

Our text begins again, “Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.’” Jesus continues to feed the people with the Word. He uses that term that we hear so often—“Kingdom of Heaven.” What is that? Well it isn’t a place so much as it’s an activity—it’s God’s gracious rule in the hearts and lives of humans. Through the gospel promises of God’s Word and Sacraments, Jesus gives us the sure hope of heaven. And this farmer owns his own field, so he wants to be sure that he plants good seed in it so that it thrives.

But, things don’t go as planned. “But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.” The Greek word used here for “weeds” is the word “Zizanium”. Zizanium is a weed that closely resembles wheat. In fact, it’s almost impossible to tell the difference between this weed and the wheat until both heads form. The grains of zizanium are black and produce a poisonous fungus.

The weeds and the wheat come from completely different sources! The weeds, unbelievers, come from Satan, and the wheat, believers come from Jesus. Oh, while they are on this earth, they seem to have much in common. They have similar goals, such as wanting to succeed and provide good lives for them and their families. The weeds and the wheat even work together, play together, and attend school together!

But because unbelief comes from Satan, he works through the weeds in his attempt to kill the wheat, and lead the wheat to hell with him. He may use the weeds to convince the wheat that all Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites, and you don’t want anything to do with them. He may use the weeds to convince the wheat that life away from the faith is more desirable than following Christ. After all, the weeds, unbelievers often seem to be growing and thriving in the field of this world more than the wheat, believers, are. And it seems as though the weeds of unbelief are threatening to choke out the wheat of true, saving Christianity.

Part 2: Living side-by-side in the field

So, what is the answer? When some believers see these weeds of wickedness in the world, they grow discouraged like the servants in the parable. “When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered,’ because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.’”

“Lord, should we destroy the unbelievers?” The Lord’s answer is an unmistakable NO. The church is not to be engaged in physically ridding the world of unbelievers by the sword. Rather, the church has only one weapon, and that is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). If unbelievers can’t be won over by the Word of God, they certainly won’t be won over by the sword of physical intimidation.

And, Jesus says, if you were to try to uproot the weeds, you might uproot some of the wheat with them. There may be some intertwining roots underneath the surface that we are not aware of. How do we know who is going to remain an unbeliever for life, or who will one day believe the Word and become wheat? So live side-by-side in your mission field and look for opportunities to bring them the saving gospel.

Perhaps you have seen the “Coexist” bumper stickers. Like almost every other political agenda, they contain some truth and plenty of falsehood. They imply several different things. One is that we ought to coexist peacefully in the world regardless of what our faith may be. And that’s true! We are not to use anything other than God’s Word to bring the gospel to unbelievers. We are not to use force or physical intimidation. It should also be noted that such bumper stickers also imply that we all worship the same god, that no matter what god you worship, they’re all the same, and all religions are equal, and Christians should just keep their mouths shut about how great their God is. Of course, that’s all wrong. Only Christ saves for eternity. No matter how powerful or intimidating the weeds of the world may be, we still look for every opportunity to win them over with the gospel for eternity.

Part 3: We have a different eternal destiny

Because the wheat has a different eternal destiny than the weeds. The owner of the field continues, “Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them into bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.” As long as this present world stands, there will be both believers and unbelievers growing together on this planet. And everyone’s life is a chance to hear the Word and believe. We call that a person’s “time of grace.” But that won’t last forever. The harvest is coming. Everyone’s life eventually comes to an end, and this world will too.

And then the harvesters, angels will weed out everything that causes sin and all who do evil, Jesus says. He says they will throw them into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Unbelievers have tempted Christians and plagued them, but after this harvest, they won’t. Christ will put a permanent end to all the temptations from the devil and the world. Not only are the weeds separated from the wheat, but they are burned forever, cast into the fires of hell. May we never grow tired or weary in bringing people the message of the gospel as long as we are on earth, so that as many as possible may avoid such a terrible fate.

But there is comfort for believers. “The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Because Jesus lived for you, died for you, rose for you, his perfection, his holiness, his righteousness, have been credited to your account. And so, in the same way that Jesus shone as bright as the sun on the mount of Transfiguration, just as brightly will you shine in heaven forever and ever. In the same way that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, so he will also take you from this world of tears to heaven with him. And sin, temptation, and pain are no longer touching the believers who have gone before us to heaven. Perhaps some of those believers in heaven include your grandparents, parents, spouses, even friends and children. So sin and temptation and pain will also no longer be able to touch you. Rather, heaven will be a place of perfect peace and joy forevermore. And when we are there, the persecutions and temptations thrown our way from unbelievers while we were on this earth will no longer matter. Because we’ll be with Jesus in his eternal kingdom which he won for us.

Conclusion

And so, what is your destiny? We will never have a clear picture of what our destiny is on this earth, in our temporary lives. Living on this sinful planet like wheat among weeds means that life is confusing, and clouded, and obscure. We may never find a clear temporary earthly destiny.

But your eternal destiny, which lasts forever, is in heaven with your Lord. It’s won for you, guaranteed for you by Jesus. As you live among the weeds, spread the gospel to them, even the intimidating ones. Look forward to your eternal destiny in heaven. Amen.