

This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

I love how Jesus told this parable of the weeds. And it's not because I'm a particularly big fan of gardening. I don't mind putting the seeds in the ground. I don't mind the mulching. I don't mind the watering. But I hate the weeding. When I was a kid my parents had this huge garden and it was my job to weed it. You go through the whole garden and think you're done. Then turn around and see a bunch of weeds that you missed. So you go through the whole process again. And then after the third time through, you realize that the weeds must just be growing as fast as you pull them. And the worst is trying to decide that little green thing with leaves is a weed or something that you intentionally planted. Last Saturday I was pulling some weeds in our front garden. Don't tell my wife, but I think I pulled up almost as many flowers as I did weeds. And sometimes I had no idea. I just closed my eyes and pulled. Again, don't tell my wife.

But this parable is just so perfect. When God reveals the characters in the parable, we can see it so clearly. God plants a crop in his field, which of course the field is the world. He uses good seed, and that seed is supposed to be us: believers. Those who are the people of the kingdom. But that terrible enemy, the Devil, sneaks in and scatters the seeds of weeds in that same field. Those weeds are unbelievers. Those who want nothing more than to block the light of God's promises from reaching us. Who want to choke believers off from the source of our life: God. And we all know some of those weeds in our lives. Whether they are celebrities or our friends, we can tell that they want nothing to do with God. They make fun of Christians. They try and distract us from our Savior. The way they talk, the way they act. Peter talks about them in his letter that we read from today. He says that they live wild and recklessly. That they live according to lust and doing what they want. And when we don't want to join in with them in their sinful ways, they are shocked! They get angry and start insulting us, making fun of us.

It's pretty clear that they are the weeds that God talks about in our parable. Wouldn't it be so much easier if we just pushed all of those people out of our lives? If we just cut them off and had nothing to do with those sinners? If we just cut out the sinners and the people who spread that filth out of our lives? After all, they are nothing but weeds.

But did you listen how God describes getting rid of the weeds? Judgement day doesn't sound so peaceful. Just listen to our Old Testament lesson again "Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. ¹³Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness! ¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble." (Joel 3:12-16a) That sounds terrible. At least we know we don't have to face that terrible pain. Just those people who we pulled out of our lives. Those weeds that distracted us. Those unbelievers who definitely aren't ever going to have faith.

But how do you know if they really are weeds? Can you say with absolute certainty that you know who the unbelievers in your life really are? And I'm not talking about just now. What if some of those unbelievers will come to faith some day. Remember, the Devil scattered those weeds among the believers. And while the servants were willing to go through and pull out all of the weeds, Jesus wasn't ready for them too: "No", he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.' (Matthew 13:29) Even after a life time of hate and denial, are you sure that the Holy Spirit can't change their hearts? Are you sure you want to write them off? After all, so many of us didn't start off looking like

healthy and productive Christians. In fact Peter says “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do...” (1 Peter 4:3) There are a lot of believers today who, at one time in their lives, were atheists-unbelievers. Besides, I don’t think it’s a great idea for us to decide who is worthy for heaven. After all, look how often our own hearts are filled with sinful desires. Just think about how often you decide to go against God’s will every day. Do you always look like a plant that God wants to harvest? God calls for us to be on the watch for people who tempt us and to be careful so that we don’t fall into their sins. But at the same time he doesn’t tell us to get rid of them. Maybe, in our desire to get rid of the unbelievers in this world we would pull out those who turn out to be Christians.

But God doesn’t call for us to sort through the good crops from the weeds. Because we can’t know. Only the one who knows hearts and reads minds knows the difference between the lost and the rescued. Only Jesus knows if someone who looks just like a weed will be called to faith. Only he can safely choose. And he has chosen you. The Lord of the Harvest knows your heart. He knows the Holy Spirit worked faith in you through his Word and planted faith deep inside you. That faith grew and became strong by God’s power. And your faith is continued to be fed and nourished by God’s promises. You are the good crop. You are people of the kingdom. And God doesn’t make mistakes. He who declared that your sins are forgiven means it. And at that last great day you “will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matthew 13:43) There is no reason for you to be afraid of that last day, because God’s judgement for you has already been decided. Jesus faced it and took on your punishment. The Lord of the Harvest says that you are victorious and he will keep you safe. “But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.” (Joel 3:16b)

But what about those who are still lost? What about those who look like weeds? What are we supposed to do with them? Ignore them? Push them out of our lives? No. Those unbelievers are dead in their sins. They throw themselves into sinful desires and living apart from God because they don’t know the one who calls them. If they never come to faith, their eternity is terrible: “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:40-42) But this isn’t what God wants for anyone. He desires everyone to come to the saving knowledge of the truth. As we look out at the world around us, we can’t see hearts. We can’t know who will be brought to faith. But we do know that we who were once weeds are now believers, and we have the message that the Holy Spirit works through to bring people to faith. In our 1 Peter lesson for today God points us to the people who still live in sinful ways. He tells us that we are to preach to those who are dead, and to go after the lost. To bring them the good news that rescues by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because the last day is coming. A day that holds terror and destruction for all of those who are lost. But for us, those who God has worked faith in, it is a day of victory and joy. The Lord of the Harvest says, “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.” (Matthew 13:43). Until that last day, we live among the weeds and our Savior has given us a mission: to take his Word to the world. God uses it to change weeds into good plants. Out of love for our God, let us use the time we have, to go to the unbelievers of this world and bring them the good news. Because the harvest is coming soon. Amen.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. Amen.