

“The Parable of the Zazania”

Matthew 13:24-43

Last week, we heard the Parable of the Sower – also from Matthew 13. What we have in this section of Matthew’s Gospel is a series of seven parables. Within these seven parables, Jesus does mix His metaphors. However, if you follow His teaching all the way through, He does have one unifying theme. These parables are not so much about you and me – the parables are about Jesus and what He does for you and me.

In the Parable of the Sower, as we saw last week, the Sower (Jesus) sows His seed (which He explains is His Word). But remember that Jesus is the Word made flesh. He comes to you and He sows Himself into you through His Word – through His proclaimed Word and His Word joined to the elements of the Sacraments.

This week, Jesus tells us another parable about a sower of seed. A man (Jesus) sows good seed in His field (like last week, His seed is always good). But, in this parable, the seed is not the Word; the good seed is the children of the Kingdom of God – the church in the world.

But there is a problem. The enemy came and sowed weeds (the Greek word is zazania). We would know this as “bearded darnel.” It is a grassy weed that looks very much like wheat until the grain forms. It is impossible to tell them apart until it is harvest time.

Jesus says that the field is the world and in this field, God has planted His children (His Church). You being a part of the Kingdom is God's good work in you. Just like last week with the Parable of the Sower, it is all about Jesus and what He has done. My place in the Kingdom of God is not a result of my decision, my thoughts, my feelings, or anything that is a result of my work. We are saved by grace through faith; it is a gift of God. He planted you in His field.

However, Jesus says, there is other seed that has been sown into the field of the world. An enemy has done this. The father of lies has done this – the evil one; the “diabolos” in the Greek – commonly translated “the devil.” “Diabolos” literally means “one who is thrown down”; that is Satan, after having been thoroughly defeated was thrown down out of heaven. That is what a devil is – one who is defeated and thrown down. Jesus says, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightening.” This defeated, thrown down enemy sows seed which grows up to be sons of Satan.

Don't try and read too much into this. In this parable, Jesus is not trying to explain why some are saved and not others. He is not trying to explain where unbelievers come from. He is making the point that the weeds and the wheat will look very much like each other up until the final harvest. It is hard to tell them apart. But, in the end, they will be separated. There will be a fiery place with weeping and gnashing of teeth for the zezania, the bearded darnel. But the righteous whom God has planted in His field will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

In the past month or so, I have mentioned a few times how we need to be aware of the greater context in which Scripture is read. In between the telling of the parable of the zezania and offering His explanation, Jesus uses two more parables to lend context to the story. “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the

seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree.”

He tells them another parable, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

So, the Kingdom of God, the active workings of God our King (Jesus) is like the Word of God being given to mankind in such a way that it is like a man planting wheat where an enemy plants things that look like wheat but aren't wheat and they will be separated at the harvest. And this man who does this is like a grain of mustard seed that seems small and insignificant yet becomes amazingly big and becomes the source of rest and shelter. Two weeks ago, in our reading from Matthew, Jesus said, “Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

And this seemingly insignificant man who is amazingly big is like leaven working its way through the entire batch of dough. Jesus tells His disciples that the Last Day (the Harvest) will not come until the Gospel has been preached to all nations. I told you that He does mix His metaphors a little bit during this string of parables. Reading the parables are challenging, and Jesus has said they are meant to be challenging. Go back and read all of Matthew 13. Jesus tells us why He speaks in parables, and it is not so that these ideas are easier to understand. They are meant to be challenging.

So wrapping our minds around Jesus' words can be difficult. What is He telling us? I don't pretend to have a full answer. However, this we can know: At the center of these parables is this man sowing this good seed. God's saving action is like a Sower who spreads the seed of His Word on four types of soil, only one of which produces saving faith (we saw that last week). The others do not receive it, have shallow faith, or let the cares of the world and our busy schedule get in the way.

This action of saving the world through the Word of God is the action of a Sower planting His perfect world, His church, His creation of believing people. The devil (having been thrown out of heaven) wants to destroy that, so he plants his own people who happen to look just like God's people. But they bear no fruit. They have no faith. They will be thrown down in the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

God's church (the Kingdom) which is elect and saved through Christ the King's action removes all evil, makes you righteous so that you shine like the sun. In order to make this action happen; this saving planting of people who sprout forth with life from the Word of God and bear fruit; for this to be possible in the new reality of a once perfect world now spoiled with sons of the devil, the action of God is like a mustard seed (seemingly small and insignificant. It looks weak; it looks foolish to think that it could grow into a tree that gives rest and shelter). Who or what is this mustard seed planted into the ground? (Think cross and grave.) Who is this that then spreads like leaven through an entire batch of dough (the church in the world) – causing the entire batch to rise? He changes the chemistry of the world in the same way He can bring life out of death.

He is working His way through the entire world, even though we do not see it (that is the way leaven works). And even though we see zezania everywhere mixed among the wheat (or at least we think we do – not even the angels can tell them apart before the harvest. Something to remember); yet even though we see all this, we can trust that what has been planted by the Sower will accomplish His purpose in the field of the world, because His seed is always good. Amen.