

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43**

**Sermon: “Patience and Love”**

Last week Jesus told us the parable of the Sower and the different types of soil. And an often-missed point is how the Sower sows His seed, the Word everywhere. And He calls us to do the same to share our faith everywhere we go. Christ died for the sins of the world; He came for everyone. This week we continue with the theme of sowing; yet this week the emphasis is on the good seed that is planted yet problems arise. In this sinful world even, the Gospel is distorted and twisted to fit one’s evil desires.

Jesus and the Early Church undoubtedly believed in the existence and work of the devil and resisted it, as we, too, must. He is the one who sows weeds in the world and the Church, indeed the one who sows weeds in our own communities that grow up and seem to threaten our very life as Church.

Despite Jesus’ warning in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, the church’s history abounds with stories of terrible spiritual purges, which started out from good and even righteous intentions in response to serious opposition or false teaching. But they quickly spiraled into cruel atrocities in which many people were persecuted or even died unjustly.

Our sinful nature is always “*crouching at the door*” (Genesis 4:7)—maybe especially when we feel we are fighting for the truth. Human anger, paranoia, and self-righteousness quickly rise in us when we are made judges over others. Human beings—even good and wise Christians—are not up to this work. It belongs to God alone.

There are many episodes of this that could be quoted. One that shows the point disturbingly well is the story of the Cathars, a movement within the Christian Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Spain and France.

This story illustrates the point well because these Cathars grew up in and with the faithful church, but at the heart of their teaching there was serious theological falsehood. They were deeply influenced by heretical Gnostic teaching and had begun to confuse others and lead them astray. They were opposed and corrected by the bishops and the pope, who in 1147 started to try to bring these false teachers back into the church, but with little success.

Anger and indignation grew, until the king of France decided it was time to deal with these weeds in God's wheatfield. He sent a French crusader army, which on July 22, 1209, attacked the town of Béziers in southern France, a Cathar stronghold.

Many ordinary faithful Christians also lived in the city and decided to fight alongside the Cathars as fellow citizens of their common town. When the city fell, Arnaud-Amalric, the commander of the French crusaders and himself a Cistercian monk, gave the order that has often since been crudely paraphrased. Realizing that there were faithful Christians among the overwhelmed citizens, he reportedly nevertheless spoke the more polished Latin version of what now appears on T-shirts: "Kill 'em all and let God sort them out." Cathars and orthodox Christians alike—men, women, and children—were slaughtered, perhaps seven thousand or more of them.

Try to preempt God's divine judgment and extract the weeds yourself, and you will kill the wheat too.

The weeds are growing (vs 24–26). Besides the growing love affair people have with their possessions and wealth, there is the growing challenge of godless and evil ideologies and false beliefs that seek to unravel God’s created order for sexuality, the family, and marriage—the very fabric of our society through which God continues to provide and curate our world. And what is even more concerning perhaps is that these ideologies are believed and embraced by more and more people. The weeds seem to be overgrowing the whole field!

There are also the weeds growing right in the midst of the Church. In the parable, these weeds have their roots insidiously intertwined with the wheat: false and misleading teaching, causing confusion, heterodox spiritual movements that may look healthy and helpful at first glance, but which turn out to be wrong pathways that ultimately lead us away from Christ and his work.

Possible examples abound: The false teaching that the Gospel is merely the acceptance of all diversity, including toleration and even celebration of sexually immoral and deviant behavior and lifestyles. Those who under the shelter of the Church’s roof have molested, abused, or mistreated others, causing terrible spiritual and psychological scars that may not heal for a lifetime.

Perhaps more familiarly, those who cause confusion and conflict in congregational or synodical life through seemingly concerned yet unfair and unloving church politicking, putting at risk the witness and mission of the church.

How do we deal with the weeds (vs 27–30a)? It can be very tempting for us as we see all this to try to become “weed-whacking” crusaders. Evil and damaging influences in the church need to be weeded out, gotten rid of once and for all. Our spiritual lives depend on it. We need to act to eradicate these weeds, don’t we? It’s up to us, isn’t it?

There is no question that we must not aid and abet or passively accept the evils we experience and see in our society and the Church. We are called to speak the truth, to witness to Christ and the Gospel as they are revealed and explicated in Scripture and the Confessions. But in this parable, Jesus warns us against taking the forcible removal of the weeds into our own hands, tempted though we may be to do so. That is not up to us.

In the parable, the householder tells his servants to leave the weeds and the wheat to grow together until the harvest, because the situation is not so simple as it may look.

As we valiantly uproot the weeds, the wheat will be pulled up too—so closely entwined are their roots. When we think we can ever completely purge and cleanse the Church of its false and evil influences, it always turns out badly.

This work requires wisdom, justice, and insight which we, still imperfect as we are, do not have. The wheat gets pulled up with the weeds.

Historical examples abound: The fifteenth-century Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, better known as the Spanish Inquisition, was begun with great hopes to rid the church in Spain of false and misleading teachers. But, as we know, it became a misguided and ultimately fanatical, paranoid, even murderous force that did untold injustice and violence to the Church.

In the Reformation era in Europe, the radical reformer Thomas Müntzer saw the great evils at work in the Church, and he called on all true Christians to join the armies of God and put all unbelievers and false Christians to death with the sword. This demonic crusade resulted in the unjust deaths of thousands of people.

The harvest is coming (vs 30b, 39b–43). Jesus’ warning to us is an important one, and yet we may ask, “Well, what about all the damage and loss the church is suffering as the weeds grow?”

We may feel understandably anxious that if we do not try to intervene in some decisive way, the Church's cause will be lost. But here in this parable of Jesus, we find the gracious wisdom and comfort of God for us as we struggle and suffer under the weight of the weeds.

The harvest is coming when God himself will justly and truly judge. It is he and he alone who is able and who will do the weeding. He sees all, knows all, and will bring all into the light. After all, he is the one who from eternity devised the plan, the only plan, that could save any of us!

We all deserved to be uprooted and thrown into the fire, but God sent his Son, Jesus, to suffer the fiery torments of hell for us on the cross. And since Jesus paid for everyone's sins, God will allow no one to be uprooted until the last stalk of wheat has been brought to saving faith.

Here is assurance and comfort for the Church as it struggles through history with the work of the devil in the world and the Church. The day of resolution and redemption is coming. God will not tolerate evil indefinitely, and it is up to him, not us, to bring in his harvest and sort out the weeds from the wheat.

The reformers, who had to struggle against falsehood and evil in the Church even more than we do today, refer to this very parable of Jesus in Augsburg Confessions VIII (“What the Church Is”). They, too, recognize that there are hypocrites and evildoers mixed in with true believers in the church communities in which we live on earth, and it is not up to us, but to God, to judge who they are.

Though we are tempted to try to eradicate evil opposition to Christ, He teaches us to wait patiently, knowing that His harvest is coming.

We are called to trust, to be faithful in our lives of daily repentance and faith. Jesus teaches us to be patient in suffering and live with the evil and opposition around us, sustained by the hope of what we cannot yet see. We know that the glory which will finally be revealed by God’s victory in Christ will outshine all we now have to bear (Romans 8:18–25). For this God is the reigning Lord of history and all its players and events, the Lord who has announced in advance the things that will happen (Isaiah 44:7) and on whose word and power to fulfill it we can utterly rely.

Amen