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## The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

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### The Christian Lives as Wheat among Weeds

The devil has no other goal than to destroy God's world and his people. He does his destructive work through others, some outside the garden of the church and some inside. Jesus speaks to this reality in this week's Gospel and **DEFINES CHRISTIANS** as people who live as wheat among weeds. He urges us to be watchful but not impulsive. He has plans to deal with the weeds in his own time.

#### Sermon

**Matthew 13:24-30; 36-42**

**Jesus told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 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 uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."**

**Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. 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 of 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. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.**

Introduction – So the sower sowed the seed on the soil and some of it started to spout. The roots went deep, the thorns weren't a threat, and the plants produced. That's the part of Jesus' parable from last week that describes us. We're the people who **hear the Word and understand it and produce a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.**

In today's Gospel, Jesus told another parable. The scenario stayed the same. We're still in a field and we're growing there with all the other believers who have been germinated by the power of the Word. Jesus calls these people—he calls us—**the people of the kingdom**. The people of the kingdom are members of the Holy Christian Church, which is the communion of saints, the gathering of believers. So this is a parable about the church. But it's not just about our church or about our church body, the synod. It's not just about 2023 or about Mequon. The parable is about the whole Christian Church in all places and in all times. The parable explains

what we can expect to happen whenever believers gather around the Word and the sacraments and the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith.

So this is what Jesus said can happen: **The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.** Jesus explained the parable like this: **The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.** The point is obvious, isn't it. Wherever there are Christians there are also going to be people who try to harm Christians. Jesus called them weeds. The weeds block out the sunlight of the gospel. They secrete the chemicals of false teaching that depress growth and they attract pests that eat away at the roots of faith. Jesus defines a Christian as wheat that lives among weeds.

OK. Wherever and whenever Christians gather together throughout history, the devil always inserts weeds to attack and destroy believers. **So what do we do with the weeds?** That's the question Jesus answers today.

Part of the problem is that the weeds aren't always obvious. Jesus said, **The enemy came and sowed weeds while everyone was sleeping.** Usually it happens that nobody really notices; nobody's expecting trouble. At first nobody even recognizes the weeds. The weeds look like the wheat. **When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.** A new teacher arrives on the scene and he's good looking and down to earth. He's everything you'd want a Christian to be. He has an interesting way of saying things and his new ideas are exciting. People trust him and they buy in. But then, little by little, people start to realize that this is really nothing but a weed.

So how do you know it's a weed? Well, you compare the weed with the wheat: this is what the wheat people say and this is what the weed people say. What the wheat people say is what God says in his Word. A person who doesn't say what God says in his Word is a weed. He's a weed not because he's Asian and not European, not because he's brown and not white, or because he's young and not old, or because he has new ways of doing things and not familiar ways. People become weeds when they say something different from what God's Word says. Think what Christian churches have had to endure through the centuries and even today. Then and now they heard teachers insist that Jesus isn't the Son of God, that life with God requires more than faith in Christ, that people have to make a decision to be saved, that the Bible contains errors, that Jesus' body never rose from the grave, that infants don't have to be baptized, that the bread and wine only represent the body and blood of Christ, that homosexuality is a natural lifestyle, that abortion is a woman's right, that living right guarantees financial prosperity. You and I have been so blessed. Most of us were born into Christian families that belonged to Bible-believing churches. We never heard false teaching preached from our pulpits or taught in our Bible classes. We never witnessed our seminary polluted by heresy. We didn't have to check out what a church believed before we joined; we just looked for the closest WELS church. But it doesn't work that way for most Christians. When they go looking for a church, they have to check the field for weeds. Some of them see the weeds and stay away but some of them don't. And the weeds of false doctrine eat away at the wheat of faith.

You and I dare not be naïve about the reality of weeds. We can't pretend weeds don't matter. Wrong teaching always matters, wrong teaching always hurts, and wrong teachers always attack Christian faith. I wouldn't try to count how often Jesus and the Bible writers warn us about this. All three readings today address it. There are people we love who are the victims of these attacks in their own churches. In some cases, the wounds are fairly superficial and not especially harmful. But in many cases the wounds are deadly and can choke and destroy faith in Jesus. We need to know about the weeds and we need to care about the people who live among the weeds. **So what do we do with the weeds?**

Over the years Christians have tried all kinds of weed killers—literally. They exterminated heretics by burning them at the stake and they burned the heretics' followers, too. They forced families who followed false teachers

to leave their homes and move away. They converted people with a sword against their throats. They established laws that robbed people of their well-being and wealth. None of that happens much anymore and it can't happen in a democracy like we live in. But some Christians think of ways they're sure will kill off the weeds: Fight for laws to make godless acts illegal; limit building permits for mosques or temples; make life miserable for neighbors who worship at false churches; pick a fight at family gatherings and neighborhood get-togethers. And they all thump their chests: "So much for the weeds!" In Jesus' parable, that's what the owner's servants wanted to do. **The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?"** What did the owner say? **No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.** The religious Round-Up we use to kill the weeds may kill the tender plants more quickly than the weeds.

**So what do we do with the weeds?** If Jesus doesn't want us to exterminate false teaching, maybe false teaching isn't as bad as we think. Maybe we shouldn't worry about it. And maybe Jesus can't do anything about it anyway. That's what some people think, but that's not what Jesus teaches. Jesus wants us to treat the weeds with the power of his Word. No swords or spears, no rage, no laws. We speak the truth in love. In the fourth century church fathers treated the weeds of anti-Christian heresies with the Nicene Creed. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans treated the weeds of Catholicism with the Augsburg Confession. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century WELS treated the weeds of modernism with the statement *This We Believe*. In our congregations we treat the weeds of defiance with the steps of Christian discipline. When we witness, we're always ready to give a reason for the hope we have. What we do with the weeds is put the Word to work.

And then we wait. Here's what Jesus said: **Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.** And here's what Jesus meant: **The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. 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 of 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.** The question is not "What do we do with the weeds" but "What does Jesus do with the weeds?" Jesus will take care of the weeds in his own time and his own way.

That's how Jesus does things...in his own time and in his own way. When the time was right Jesus descended to our world as a child, not as a king. Time and time again Jesus carried out his Father's will and supplied the perfect obedience we lacked. At his time and at no one else's time Jesus went to the cross and endured the divine punishment we had coming. Before three days passed, Jesus rose from his tomb to assure us that our sins were forgiven and that we had life with God forever. At the time of our birth Jesus worked faith in our hearts in baptism and joined us to the family of God. Time and again Jesus feeds us and strengthens us with his Word and sacrament. When our final time comes, Jesus will carry our souls to the pleasures of heaven. And then at a time no one knows Jesus will come again. At that time he will exterminate the weeds and destroy all those who worked to choke and starve and destroy the people in God's garden. And then—you heard Jesus say it--**The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Amen.**