



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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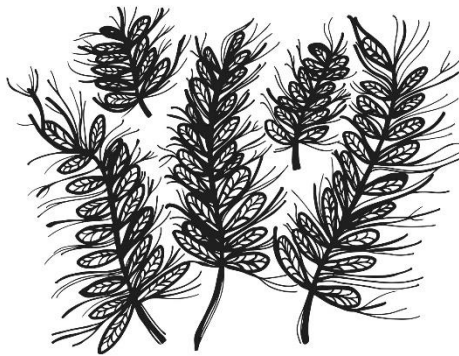
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Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 23, 2023
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

It is an age-old question: why is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds Jesus suggests that both grow together until the harvest. With Paul, we long for the day that all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. Having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly place our hope in the promises of God, and from the Lord's table we go forth to bear the fruit of justice and mercy.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and on-line with us today! Here at Grace Luthera we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together to learn the ways of the Lord, to walk in God's truth, and to revere in the holy name in which we are saved. So we thank our God with all our heart and glorify God's name forevermore. For great is God's love toward us, delivering us from the pit of death, and so full of graciousness and compassion, slow to anger and full of kindness and truth. And so God's mercy on us strengthens us to serve, saves us from sin, and shows us favour even in our shame. Praise be to our Lord, for our help and our comfort, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: The Numberless Gifts of God's Mercies (#683)

GREETING

The purifying grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the cleansing love of God, and the fellowshiping righteousness of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 204)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, the sower of the field, continue to be gracious with us that we may ripen into the children of your realm to live with you in love and service forever, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 44:6-8

A reading from Isaiah.

There are no other gods besides God: the word of the LORD does not fail to come to pass. We can trust in God, through whom Israel—and we—are redeemed.

⁶Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.

⁷Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.

Who has announced from of old the things to come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.

⁸Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 86:11-17

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

¹²**I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
and glorify your name forevermore.**

¹³For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the pit of death.

¹⁴**The arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent people seeks my life;
they have not set you before their eyes.**

¹⁵But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

¹⁶**Turn to me and have mercy on me;
give your strength to your servant, and save the child of your handmaid.**

¹⁷**Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame;
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.**

SECOND READING: Romans 8:12-25

A reading from Romans.

For Paul, true spirituality means that we experience the reality of the Spirit, which enables us to pray as God's children, keeps us in solidarity with creation, and gives us unseen hope that God will liberate us and creation from bondage to death and decay.

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

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

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus tells a parable about the coexistence of good and evil in this world. God's judgment will remove all evildoers and causes of sin, but not until the end of human history.

²⁴[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

God of all harvest and plenty, may your Spirit lead us in our listening, our discerning, and in our pruning this day and throughout our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I have some shocking news for you all. I'm no farmer. I'm sure most of you look at me and automatically think, "yup, he's a farmer." But I totally am not. In fact, I'm not even much of a gardener. Other than plants needing to be watered every now and then, I have no clue as to how to care for any kind of vegetation whatsoever. It's just not who I am.

So when Jesus drops these kind of parables about plants or farming or general growing stuff, I'm a bit confused. I mean, I understand that Jesus used parables to make the things he's teaching easier to understand, but I just sometimes wish he'd use more relatable examples. You know, stuff like fast cars or Marvel movies.

But I had to chuckle with this parable that we get today, because it reminded me of something that actually happened to me in my life. I think I was right out of high school and my church I grew up at was doing a fundraiser that offered gardening services. I volunteered of course, not because I love gardening, but because I just do whatever my buddies do. Our little team was assigned to our pastor's house... who admittedly wanted a lot more done than what we were capable of. He wanted the regular grass cutting of course, but he also wanted us to hack down this giant forest of foliage on the side of the house, clean out this wasteland of garbage beside

his garage, and even dig out some 50 year old stump that had roots like tree trunks... that came out of this tree trunk.

Anyway, the whole day was full of back breaking work. But the part that I want to talk about is that forest of foliage. I tell ya, this thing was overgrown. It was covered with weeds that were like waist high and were really secure in the ground, and our pastor wanted this thing cleared up. So we cut, pulled, dug, yanked, scratched ourselves, cried a little, and repeated that over and over. It took forever. It got to a point that I was so frustrated that I went ballistic on these plants and grabbed handfuls and yanked with all my might, pulling up ground, rock, and whatever else might be holding these things in.

Then one of my friends stopped me after a few minutes of extreme frenzied gardening and showed me some of the weeds I so mercilessly extracted from the dirt, and at the bottom of them were these little bulbs of something that didn't quite look like just roots. "They're turnips," he said.

Now, I wasn't sure if they were accidental turnips or intentional, and to be honest I'm not even sure what a turnip even is or if these things were actually them, but my goodness did that experience bring this parable alive for me.

"For in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them." Or turnips for that matter. Now where was that advice like 20 years ago when this happened? So this experience really drove home to me the dangers of just pulling out weeds like crazy, because who knows what other goodies die along with them.

But so often in life we like to rip things out, thinking that they're not good for us or are causing us pain or just because we don't like them for whatever reason, in order to protect ourselves from them. We extract these things efficiently and mercilessly, perhaps not really thinking about how it might affect the things around them. We trim away and remove all unnecessary aspects of life according to us, in order that the "good" parts of us might live and thrive. But it seems like Jesus is warning us from doing this with his parable.

But before we get into that, can we just take a moment to appreciate the humour in this story? Like, weeds are surprisingly growing in this prize garden and the first reaction is "an enemy has done this." I mean, really? An enemy? I just can't imagine some villain twirling his moustache coming up with his master plan of planting weeds some his archnemesis' garden. It just doesn't seem like a real "enemy" thing to do.

Then again, maybe it is. Maybe it's a bit more complicated than that. Maybe even these supposed seasoned gardeners in the parable might have had a hard time telling the weeds from the wheat. I mean I had a hard time telling weeds apart from turnips, so I guess it really could happen to anyone, even fictional gardeners in a story about fictional weeds and wheat.

I've read that it's been surmised that the weed that is talked about in the parable is likely the bearded darnel, which some of you might have heard about. Basically it's this invasive weed that looks pretty much identical to wheat. It isn't wheat though, in that it grows different, looks a little different, and oh yeah it's poisonous to a certain degree so maybe we shouldn't make bread with it.

So if this is indeed the case, that the weeds in this parable are the bearded darnel, then there really was a good reason the landowner told them to not yank them out. Quite literally they could reach for a bearded darnel and all too easily grab wheat instead. Perhaps this really could be the work of an enemy because it could cause some real damage to the harvest. Maybe it is infinitely better to just leave the weeds where they are.

It's just that, leaving them goes against our most natural instincts, doesn't it? I mean, when we see something that doesn't belong, we want to pluck it out. Be it a weed in our garden, an ingrown hair in places that should be clean shaven, or maybe even a person out of our lives. It's pretty obvious when those kinds of things need to be taken out, because they're different, they're noticeable, they stand out in some way and practically scream out "Pluck me! Pluck me!" (that's "pluck" as in p-l-u-c-k for those of you who might not hear so well)

So I think Jesus' point in his parable today is that maybe what needs to be removed might not be so clear. Sometimes whatever needed to be taken out kind of blends into the background. Sometimes, there are no distinguishable features that tell you what to keep and what to toss. This is what the landowner was warning the workers about. This is exactly what happened with those possible turnips that I pulled out. And this is something that could be happening with all of us when we react, discern, and ultimately judge what should and shouldn't be.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we shouldn't react to negativity in our lives, but I wonder if the knee jerk reaction we have to remove all "bad" things could be detrimental. I wonder if cutting things out too quickly and without consideration might lead to us missing out on some learning or growth opportunity. I wonder if by extracting parts of our lives might extract parts of ourselves too.

I know, it's our gut reaction. Our instinct is toward self preservation. We just want to protect ourselves. I'm just saying that maybe it isn't up to us. Maybe we don't need to cut things out for protection. Maybe God will be faithful and just and choose to love us, scruples and all, and continue to refine us and purify us and reform us as we are forgiven and redeemed by the grace that calls us children of God. Just as the landowner saved the distinction and separation to the end, perhaps we can leave our own judgements up to God.

So then maybe we don't have to worry about the weeds disguised as wheat in our lives. We don't have to micromanage and figure out what should be plucked and what should be left planted. We don't need to judge others or even ourselves in terms of salvation, because we have a Saviour who determines that for us through a lens of grace and mercy.

This is the hope that Paul talks about, in things yet unseen. That by the power of the Spirit, we might be able to move into the future with confidence in God's promises of redemption, knowing that our work and who we are is not in vain, but honoured and blessed by the God who gives us strength. And through it all, God invites and welcomes us into God's kingdom, showing us our value and worth as God's beloved children, reminding us that we are both broken yet whole, sinner yet saint, weed yet wheat.

In this season after Pentecost, may we be liberated from our self judgements and our judgements of others, that we be freed to love, serve, and live in community with God and each other, now and always. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: For the Fruit of All Creation (#679)

CREED (p. 104)

Together with all the sinners made to be saints, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called to have hearts purified by the Spirit, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God, by your saving mercy," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. God, by your saving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you teach us your ways and we walk in your truth, revering your name and proclaiming good news to all people. Strengthen us in our ministry, that your love for all people be reflected in all that we do. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use our building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and all of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for Faith Lutheran Church in Kelowna and their pastor Brian Krushel; and for Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in North Vancouver and their pastor Vida Jaugelis. God, by your saving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we thank you with all our heart for the great love you have toward us, shown through all that you have made and provided. May our care for your creation be reflective of your grace, that its beauty and wonder be a testament to all that you have done. We continually pray for this world and everything in it, that all might live in harmony and peace and mutual respect. God, by your saving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, the arrogant and violent rise up against your ways, but our eyes are always set on you. Grant your wisdom to all world leaders and politicians that together we can work our way toward peace. We pray for the areas of the world that face war and political turmoil, that your hand of healing and grace be upon them. Also we pray for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. God, by your saving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you turn to us in mercy and give us your strength and salvation. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love and grace fill us with the joy and peace of your promises. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Beulah; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... God, by your saving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your favour for us is shown through your promises and grace, granting us citizenship in your kingdom and a place in your family. Your help and comfort is seen in the lives of the saints that inspire us in our own faith and ministry. May we be strengthened by the connection we have with the saints, and may your community last forever. God, by your saving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the gracious restoration of our souls, given to us by Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE (p. 106)

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who reminds us of your love and grace that lifts us up out of our shame, and so we can join with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 207)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy God, you are mighty and merciful and to you we owe you all our thanks and praise. You lift us up out of the pit of our despair and you show us a love and grace that surpass all understanding. And then you send to us Jesus, you Son, to show us how we are accepted into your kingdom and family even while we were sinners and we are made to be saints.

For on the night that Jesus was betrayed, he sat with his friends knowing that this was their final meal together, and he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it and said, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the common cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

So it is in this bread and cup that we are shown your faithfulness, providence, and deliverance as we are reminded of our connection and unity, together proclaiming this basis of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O God, that all honour and glory belong, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 112)

Gathered together as one people under God by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see God's open arms of love and grace.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 208)

As the Grains of Wheat (#465)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for again feeding and nourishing us with your Word and truth, and leading us to see the glory of your righteousness and salvation. Strengthen us as we go from here, that we might faithfully proclaim all that you have done through your grace and mercy, by all that we say and do, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God our Shepherd bless you and keep you,
God our Saviour shine on you and be gracious onto you,
God the Spirit look upon you with favour, and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Drawn to the Light (#593)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live in the hope and confidence of God's promises.
Thanks be to God.

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