

SERMON NOTES

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Synaxis Gospel
Matthew 13:24-30

THE FATHER'S KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

In chapter twelve of Matthew's Gospel, the Pharisees had made it clear to the crowds that the religious leaders rejected Jesus as the promised great Messiah/King or Christ. In response to this opposition, Jesus began teaching the public in a more indirect way. This new way of teaching was in the form of parables. With parables, deep truths could be taught publicly, but only understood by those who were His true disciples.

Parables were little stories, about common everyday experiences, that taught a hidden spiritual message. They needed to be interpreted. Jesus explained the parables to those who were truly interested, to those who had "ears to hear."

The parable of our reading is the second of a series of seven. The first was the Parable of the Soils, also known as the Parable of the Sower. The Parable of the Soils represented the four types of responses people have to the Gospel. Only one type of response produced fruit for the kingdom. This second parable is known as the Parable of the Tares. In it, the world of mankind is divided into only two groups, the good and the evil. The third, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, and the fourth, the Parable of the Yeast, show the growth and extent of the kingdom. The fifth, The Parable of the Treasure, and the sixth, The Parable of the Pearl, illustrate the value of the kingdom to God and the great price He paid for it. Finally, the last, the Parable of the Dragnet, again returns to the theme of our reading: there are two groups of people mixed together in the world, the good and the bad, which will be separated at the judgment at the end of the age.

The criterion that God will use to determine the good from the bad seems to be the purpose of the first parable, and so, our reading must keep that in mind. How a person responds to the Gospel message determines which group they will join. Does s/he receive the Gospel gladly, and let its roots go deep into the heart, producing a life of obedient devotion to God? Or will s/he let Satan or life concerns steal away the message? The following Parable of the Tares illustrates the results of that choice.

SYNAXIS READING

Matthew 13:24-30

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away.

“But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

“And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’

“And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ And the slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’

“But he said to them, ‘No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ “

NOTES

He presented another parable to them, saying,

This is the second of the parables that Matthew records in chapter thirteen. Jesus told several parables—short stories making a special point—to help us understand what is meant by the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God. But the meanings of the parables were not understood by those who were only interested in being entertained. People liked to listen to the stories. But, to understand required a willingness to do so—as Jesus put it: eyes to see and ears to hear. For those who asked, He explained the meanings. In our reading, we are only given the story, not the meaning, which is given later in verses 37-43.

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

The kingdom is likened to a man: his actions and his decisions. The man has a field and in it he sows good seed. But, the man’s enemy sneaks in at night, and contaminates the field with bad seed.

The good seed is wheat, and the bad seed (*tares*) is a weed known as darnel, which looks like wheat as it grows. But when the heads of grain appear, then the darnel can be seen as a different plant.

And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’

The slaves might have thought that the good seed had been mixed with the weed before the sowing.

And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’

But the landowner knew that he had sown completely good seed. He knew, then, that an enemy had over-sown his field with darnel.

And the slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then to go and gather them up?’

This response is probably what the enemy hoped the landowner would decide to do about the problem.

“But he said to them, ‘No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn,’ ” ’ ”

The roots of both kinds of plants had no doubt intertwined in the growing process. In order not to destroy the good plants, the landowner decided to wait until harvest, when the separation could be done without harm to the wheat, and his good crop would be saved.

APPLICATION

This parable, given by our Lord, was not simply a lesson in good farming techniques. It had a spiritual point, which Matthew records a few verses beyond our reading. The disciples knew that there was a message in the parable, and therefore, sometime later, when they had entered the house and were away from the crowds, they asked Jesus to explain it to them.

The parable was about the two kinds of people in the world, and what will happen at the end of this age. Jesus explained that the landowner was an illustration of the “Son of Man,” that is, the divine King.¹ We know ‘Son of Man’ was a title that Jesus often used for Himself. The field is the world; it belongs to the Son, and was originally meant to be a place for the flourishing of God’s beloved mankind. The good seed that Jesus Christ sows are *the sons of the kingdom*, while the weeds are *the sons of the evil one*. In these two examples, the word *son* is used to describe someone who reflects the characteristics of what they are called the *son* of—either the son of the kingdom of heaven or the son of the evil one.

The one, who sows the weeds, or the sons of the evil one, is the devil. The harvest is the judgment of mankind at the end of the age. The reapers are the angels sent by God to bring both kinds of people before His judgment seat. There, the sons of the evil one will be condemned to Hell, but the sons of the kingdom will “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

We know people do not begin as “sons of the kingdom of heaven,” but that they must first believe in, and receive, Christ, before they have the power to become the children of God.² Those who reject Christ have no power to resist the devil, and become his ‘sons.’³

¹ Daniel 7:13-14

² John 1:12

³ John 8:44-47; 2 Timothy 2:26

For the purpose of this parable, Jesus did not explain this point. He simply begins with the two kinds of people. The Son plants His children throughout the world, and the devil does the same with those that belong to him, in order to cause trouble.

We often wonder why God allows evil people to thrive in the world. This parable teaches that God does not root them out, because He is concerned for His followers and their spiritual well being. Instead, He allows both kinds of people to continue until the judgment at the end of the world. Only then, will He finally separate them. At that time, those who are not His children will be cast “into a furnace of fire,” a terrible place of great weeping, great remorse. But the other group of people, those who belong to God, will be recognized as sons of the kingdom of heaven, with a glory like the shining sun.

Jesus further explained that, like the wheat and the weeds, the children of God and the followers of the devil often cannot be distinguished from one another. The children of the evil one will look like the children of God. The difference will only show up in the results of their lives—the final product will be either goodness, or evil, with respect to God. But only God can make that judgment.

Therefore, it is not the place of man to determine what kind of person another may be, with respect to the kingdom of God. Furthermore, it is not our place to destroy from the world persons we may think do not belong to God’s kingdom. However, if one studies the history of the Church, it will be seen that persons calling themselves Christians, in political power, have not always understood this teaching. The consequences have been tragic. People, who dared to differ with those in power, have been hounded, persecuted, tortured and killed—all in the name of Christ. No, no, God does not call His servants to weed out the sons of the evil one. That separation will be handled by God, Himself, in His own time.

Nevertheless, the teaching of the Parable of the Tares is of the greatest importance. Much of the world lies in the grip of the evil one, and their condition is hidden even from themselves. Therefore, God has called His servants to another task—to show compassion and love to all, especially to those who call themselves Christians.

We are sent out with a message of hope to a dying world, to a world that, very soon, may be approaching the end of the age. That message is that God loves all men, no matter to which of the two groups we may belong. He became a Man, Jesus Christ, to die for all of our sins so that if we gratefully accept His sacrifice on our behalf, we will find ourselves in that blessed group, which, in the end of time, will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

It is not our Father’s will that any should perish, but that all might come to know Him.⁴ Therefore, let us prayerfully devote ourselves to that sacred mission of carrying the Gospel at home, and to the ends of the world—for the sake of our loved ones, our friends, our people, and our fellowman—to bring them all into the Kingdom of our Father.

⁴ 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9