

“Dark secret, sunny future” Mt 13:24-30, 36-43

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Have you ever been upset about something that happens in your church, in your congregation? How did this person dare to do this, or to say that? How can someone be so foolish, or tactless? How can our pastor be such and such... Why doesn't anyone listen to what I'm saying? Why do these people come to our church at all? What kind of Christians they are anyway?

If you have had any of these questions running through your mind, then you also may have been pondering along these lines - ‘it's enough for me, if this continues, then I don't want to be in this church anymore’. And so many following this kind of thinking actually have left ... and yes, what have they left? – they have left the Lord Jesus, their only hope, their future.

If you have had any of these questions or thought, and I assume we all have had them, then today's Jesus parable is for you. It will help us to find the answer to the question *‘why to remain a Christian, and a member of a congregation despite of all our imperfection’*, and hopefully this parable will also us give something to share with others who may have had similar experiences.

Jesus told this parable about the Kingdom of Heaven. That we can compare it with a man who sowed good seed in his field, but then enemy came and sowed weeds. When his servants offered to gather the weeds, He refused, but said to leave them till the harvest time, - lest they root up the wheat along with the weed. Then they could gather the weeds and burn them, and the wheat gather in his barn.

As Jesus did with other parables, following His disciples' request, He also explained this one. **"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels."**

Brief and clear. But at the same time difficult to comprehend. Why would the weeds be allowed to grow together with the wheat? See, we all have some ideas about what the Church should look like. And also other people have their ideas.

How would we like to see the Church? Wouldn't we want to see it as a gathering of wonderful, loving, beautiful people, such people whose company we would always enjoy...

...such people that others in community would like to join our party seeing how beautiful are our relationships, how loving and mutually supporting we are, how unanimous in everything, how caring about others within and outside our community...

...with beautiful services, with such an eloquent pastor that you would like to bring others to listen to him, with such a close fellowship that everyone would feel accepted and precious. Who wouldn't want to be a part of a congregation like that?

It could be a nice goal for all of us, indeed. We should do our best to achieve it. But don't be fooled by false hopes. Where the Son of Man, Jesus Christ sows His seed, there the evil one comes and sows his. One next to another.

Then we wonder, - how is this possible? We have such a good intentions, such nice planes, but... from where all the problems and difficulties and misunderstandings, and conflicts come. Can't we just gather all the weed, burn them and have beautiful and clean wheat growing? Ideal congregation...

Jesus message in this parable is amazing. **'No, don't do it! Lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.'**

There is a dark, dark secret that makes Jesus say this. Do you want to hear it? We are quite keen to gather what we believe to be the weeds and to 'burn them', so to speak. Jesus, on the other hand, hesitates. Why?

There is a good reason for Him not to pull the weeds out right now. Because these weeds are not just among us. They are within us. They grow in the fertile soil of our broken hearts. We are these weeds. Yes, we. And this is exactly the reason we need to be here. This is the reasons Jesus came to us. He didn't come to save the righteous, but sinners. That's who we are.

Of course, we are also the wheat, we are the good seed that the Son of Man has sown. As Luther so famously put it - we are simultaneously both saints and sinners. Sinners according to our old nature, saints according the Spirit, Who is given to us in our baptism, and Who works so hard to transform our hearts and minds, and lives.

Jesus knows who we are, nothing is hidden from Him, that's why He is so patient with us. He knows that there is nothing good in our hearts. If we somehow saw hearts, I mean our very selves, of all people and would have to find ours – we couldn't - they all would be the same...

Dark, full of passions, and rebellious against God. All good things in us come only from the Holy Spirit. This is why we need to have a realistic view on the Church. That is a gathering of saints, yes, but at the same time - of sinners.

I'm not endorsing acceptance of what is clearly wrong, in thought, words or deeds, in no way. I just want us to be realistic about what the Church, the Kingdom of Heaven is like these days.

There is a lot of brokenness, a lot of ugliness, a lot of pain among us. And we are invited to bring all of this and to lay at Jesus feet, to hand over our sins to Him and to receive in exchange His forgiveness and the Spirit of Holiness. This is His deal with us. "Come to me all who are heavy laden, and I'll give you rest."

As for now, this is a time for repentance, this is a time, when God's grace is still extended to fallen humanity. This is a time when God the Creator and Redeemer patiently waits for every person to come to the knowledge of the truth and to accept the new life that is offered and given in Jesus Christ.

But, as Jesus showed it in His parable, this is not the end of the story. It is important to notice, that half of the explanation regarding the meaning of this parable is devoted to what is still to come. Let's read it once more.

"Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

When we look at Jesus explanation we come closer to the answer to our question, why would we need stay in a congregation where not everything is ideal. Or maybe even far from ideal. Why would we try to invite other to such a congregation?

Because of what is going to happen in the future. Because of what is going to happen when Jesus returns, or in case of many, or may be of all of us, because of what is going to happen when our time is over. This is the most important thing.

The end of the age. The harvest time. When finally all causes of sin and all law breakers will be gathered and thrown into the fiery furnace. Because of this we desperately need to stay in God's presence, where He has promised to be.

You see, the way of Jesus disciples isn't an easy one. And it is not a short one. It is as long as our lives. Because it is not about learning some principles and then living our lives as it pleases us. No! It is about enduring through this evil age, about keeping the true faith till the end.

For this is what counts. To finish this life having a good conscience before God. Knowing that all your sins are forgiven, that your Father is waiting for you, that He is pleased with you.

There is only one way to be sure about it. Only one way. When the Holy Spirit assures you of the Father's love. When you hear the words that are spoken by Jesus command and on behalf of Him: "I forgive you all your sins. Peace be with you." When you are assured that all Jesus promises apply to you. Yes, to you.

Our journey is long and sometimes not easy. We, our renewed nature, need to be strengthened and we need to be feed. This is why our Lord has appointed times and places where He comes to be with us and to bless us.

It is like being on a very long journey, where you need to refill your car, you need to get more food. When you stop in a petrol station or in a grocery store you don't make a wry face because others there are not exactly the people you would choose. You know what you need. You can't move further if you don't have it.

The same with our following Jesus. Without Him and His help we can do nothing. We need to remain with Him, we need to keep receiving His life giving words and His life giving body and blood if we want to make it till the end.

When we understand that this really is about life or death, it helps us to look to the Church from other perspective. Then we don't worry that the Church is not perfect. Then we rejoice whenever someone else, imperfect as we all are, is brought to Jesus to receive the healing and forgiveness that we all need so much.

When we keep focused on this perspective, it makes it easier. We know what is at stake. Then we can see our petty disagreements or dislikes as what they are, signs of our brokenness. Then with the help of the Holy Spirit we can love our brothers and sisters in Christ as they are. Saints and sinners. Just like us.

For we all are chosen and called by God. And one day **‘[we all as] the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.’** This is where we are heading. This is what is promised to us.

Just one last remark. This parable was about the Kingdom of heaven. As it is now. We discussed that it is far from beautiful. But there is something else we need to see. We are in this Kingdom.

It is among us. We are citizens of this Kingdom already now. It is hidden, yes. Still full of weeds, yes. But it is here, and we belong to it, and no one can take it away from us.

Look around. Look at the people in the pews next to you. They are going to inherit eternity together with you. Just think about it, you will spend eternity together. In new bodies, without sin, as beautiful as God has intended us to be.

This time is coming. But while we are here, in this life, let's begin to appreciate one another. Let learn more about one another. For we are and going to be – one family in Christ.

Amen.