

“Do you have ears?” 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.””

We could say that today we continue the same topic that we looked at the last time, as we continue to read the same chapter thirteen from the Gospel according Matthew.

The last Sunday we heard Jesus explaining to us, how exactly He builds His Church. That is, by His Word. As prodigally generous Sower He sows the seed everywhere, He doesn't worry that some of it may be wasted.

Do you remember why? Because He desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And this is, why He sends us to tell everyone about Him. Jesus also explained why majority of the seed doesn't bear fruit.

Satan snatches away some of it, if we don't understand what Jesus speaks to us. Hardness of our hearts and unwillingness to repent from our sins makes it hard for the Word to grow in us. And finally, deceitfulness of riches and our cares about good worldly things choke the Word, and we don't have time for Jesus.

Today Jesus continues to speak to His disciples as He tells us another parable about the Kingdom of God. Do you remember how Jesus begun His public preaching? The same way as John the Baptist. The same way as the apostles after Him. “Repent and believe in the Gospel, for the Kingdom of God is near, it is among you.”

The Kingdom of God. The language may be misleading. We may wrongly picture this kingdom as some sort of territory. What Jesus is talking about is reign of God, when God Himself comes and reigns among His people.

When He comes and dwells with us and changes our hearts. Martin Luther explains it in the Small Catechism. *“How does God’s Kingdom come”?* When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity.”

See, God’s Kingdom is among us, when the Father gives us His Holy Spirit, that we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life. And do you know what is especially comforting in Jesus’ words?

He speaks about His Kingdom among us as about already existing reality. The Kingdom of God is already among us. For our gracious Father continues to send us His Holy Spirit as Jesus continues to speak to us His message of forgiveness.

Although hidden, for our eyes can’t see it, the Kingdom of God is already here. We already are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Triune God Himself already dwells among us and with us.

And sometimes we can experience glimpses of it. When God’s Spirit in us draws us closer to Jesus. When Jesus love urges us to ask: “What would you, Jesus, want me to do?”. Or “how can I honor You with my life”.

When we begin to pray for our enemies, and forgive those who have treated us badly. When we pray for their salvation, rather than destruction. When we look to serve, not to revenge. This is God’s Kingdom among us. It is here already.

If only we could see ourselves as our dear Lord sees us. If only we could see how all God’s children are united in the same Spirit, how we are united not only with our Lord Jesus and the Father, but also with one another and with all the saints in all times and places. What a magnificent picture it is!

However, as Jesus explained the last Sunday, only a few are interested to listen to Him as He speaks about His mysteries and reveals His secrets, and today Jesus tells something else to describe the reality of the Church here in this age.

Jesus compares His Kingdom with the field where good seed is sown, but then comes the evil one and sows weeds. At first sight, it is difficult to know the wheat from the weed. And the reality is, that they grow so close together.

Since the early church it has been the understanding that Jesus here speaks about the Church. Yes, the field in the parable is explained to be the world. But then the sower comes and in this world sows good seed, the children of God.

But the evil one comes and sows weeds, the children of the evil one, right among God’s people. And they grow together till the end of this age. Here, in Jesus’ church. The servants wanted to pull the weeds out, but Jesus said that they should remain till the end of this age, lest the good seed is accidentally

damaged. Isn't that a scary and sad thought? That the children of the Kingdom and the children of the evil one are here together, and that it will be this way till the end of this age. Let's reflect of this a little more.

Who were those people that Jesus was addressing with all these parables? We could say that they were ... yes, the church of that day. People who were waiting for their savior to arrive.

Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, members of synagogues. The church. There is something scary going on. They all heard Jesus speaking. Many of them listened very carefully.

Many even invited Jesus to speak to them so that they could hear His message. But something went wrong, and they didn't become Jesus' disciples. Again, and again Jesus repeats these words: "He who has ears, let him hear!"

These words refer to what God Yahweh said through Isaiah the prophet: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."

These are heavy, heavy words. All these people who were curious about Jesus' teaching, they heard Him and saw Him, but at the same time they... didn't. How is this even possible?

It is, in fact, very simple. And Isaiah explains it. The problem is with people's hearts. Their hearts have grown dull and they refuse to take to heart when Jesus speaks to them, they refuse to see and to understand.

Why? So that there is no need for them to change. Many of those who listened to Jesus knew the Scriptures, many of them were in their synagogues every Sabbath. Many of them were waiting for God's chosen Messiah, Savior.

But when they heard with their ears Jesus speaking, their hearts remained dull. There was a great abyss between their ears and their hearts. Of course, they heard the words, but they locked their hearts and decided that this doesn't apply to them.

Do you think much has changed? Are we different? Today Jesus continues to speak to people through His messengers. And many hear His words. But how many have ears to hear and to understand and to live it out in their lives?

How many simply listen to pastors preach and teach the same way they listen and watch interesting movies or shows. 'That was an interesting sermon... or Bible Study.' Almost as interesting as that show on Friday.'

Instead of asking: “Explain me these words” and “what shall I do, what would you, Jesus, want me to do where I am?” They think that Jesus’ message doesn’t apply to them. They simply don’t hear.

Similarly, as in Jesus’ time. Multitudes heard Him, but only a few had ears to hear. But those who heard, not only with their ears, but also with their hearts, followed Him. They changed the world. Jesus said ‘follow’, and they followed.

They didn’t say: “O that’s an interesting thought. You don’t really expect us to follow you, right?” Jesus taught them, and they said: “Explain us, we want to understand what you teach!” Or “what shall we do now, how shall we live?”

Jesus sent them and they went. They didn’t say: “That was a good missional speech, Jesus, good job!” As Luther put in the Small Catechism, the Kingdom of God is when “we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life.”

To be a Christian is not about simply believing some ideas. It is about following Jesus with everything we are. Do you know where in the Bible Jesus said to His disciples: “Believe that I am your savior, and that’s enough.”

Do you know? That’s right. There is no such place. Jesus never said it. Instead He said: “Follow me!” It is easy to say that we believe the idea that Jesus is our Savior, it is much harder to say, – “I will follow you, Lord, what do you want me to do, send me!”

When we listen to Jesus words and they get lost between our ears and our hearts, this tells us somethings. It tells that we are not free. That somethings, or someone is more important to us than Jesus. That’s about the 1st Commandment.

That we love and trust something else more than true God. That we are not free to live for Him. And to certain extent it is true for us all. Do you know what holds you back? What doesn’t allow you to freely follow Jesus?

What do you think about more than you do about Jesus? What do you fear to lose more than your faith and salvation? This is what keeps your ears shut, and your heart locked. This is what keeps the Kingdom of God away from you.

Maybe you are afraid to look strange in the eyes of others talking too much about Jesus? Being too Christian... Maybe you are afraid that following Jesus will mean that you need to change your sexual behavior? Maybe it will mean that you need to be more generous with your money and your time?

Maybe you are afraid that if you take Jesus’ words seriously, you will have to ask for forgiveness to those whom you have hurt, and make peace with people whom you hate? Satan uses whatever works to keep us enslaved. It’s different for each of us.

But remember this, when Jesus calls you, He doesn’t ask you fit Him in in your busy life, when you have nothing else better to do. When He calls you, He calls all of you, not a small part of you. He confiscates you for Himself.

For Jesus Christ, true man and true God, He didn't give up a little part of Him to redeem you. He gave up everything, – Himself, His life. On the cross. He gave all of Him in exchange of all of you.

And He has done it so that you may be His own. You are His own. That's God's greatest gift to you. This is, why He keeps gently speaking to you. This is, why He keeps sending His Spirit into your heart. This is, why He never gives up on you.

We all have weeds in us, we all often act like children of the evil one. And our Lord graciously and patiently cares for us. Quietly calls us. Enlightens us with the Gospel. Weeds us with His Spirit. Creates in us new hearts. As long, as we are here He will never give up on you. He wants each of you in His Kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, I pray that you have ears to hear Jesus' call. When Jesus speaks to you, don't harden your hearts. That the Kingdom of God may grow in you and through you. Be wise! For, as Jesus said:

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” Have ears! Amen.