

“The Disappointing Kingdom.” 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.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Have you ever been disappointed in how Jesus is running His Church? Have you ever been disappointed in how He is running your congregation? In what she is like, with what she does and doesn't do?

If you have been disappointed, you certainly are not alone. Two millennia ago, God's faithful people were waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. What were they waiting for? They lived in a world ruled by ruthless despots. In the world filled with injustice and violence. They were waiting for someone who would be powerful enough to change it. To bring forth better times, a better life of freedom and justice and peace.

They were waiting for the promised Saviour, for God's anointed One, the Messiah. For the One who would establish God's Kingdom, where everything will be good, where everything will be as it is supposed to be.

In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to dwell among us. And Jesus certainly got attention. He spoke with authority, He healed everyone who was brought to Him, He had power over forces of darkness, forces of creation and even over death.

But... those who had been waiting for this promised Saviour, they were disappointed. This Jesus seemed promising and with some potential, but... the oppressors kept oppressing, the evil ones flourished and justice was not there.

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As you may remember, even John the Baptist sent a couple of his disciples to Jesus to inquire: **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** [Mat 11:3] Things didn’t seem to be changing for better with Jesus’ advent.

Then, after His death and resurrection, before His ascension back to the Father, the Risen Lord Jesus declared: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** [Matt 28:18] This is another way to explain what the Gospel is.

Not on a personal level, when you learn that Jesus has reconciled you with God the Father, that He has taken full responsibility for everything wrong that you have ever done and will do, and for everything good that you have failed to do.

But also, that Jesus from Nazareth, true man and true God has begun His reign. That all authority has been given to Him. Our Guy is in charge! He rules! From now on it should be good for us, a better life for His chosen people, right?

But is it? Are things in the world the way we would hope them to be if Jesus ruled? Are they in the Church? We are not the first to be disappointed. The same was true back then when Jesus walked among us teaching everyone who had ears to listen.

To address our expectations, Jesus tells this parable of the Weeds. Basically, what He says is, yes! sorry! but this is what you are to expect. Things are as they are and they are not going to change much. Not in this age, anyway. That’s it.

[There has been a debate about what Jesus is referring to when He explains that the field in that parable is the world. Is He referring to this age, or is He referring to the Church as it exists in this age? It seems that the latter makes more sense.]

The Church exists in the world, sure. Jesus sows the good seed, the sons of the Kingdom, God’s people, but in the same place where Jesus sows the good seed, the enemy comes and sows bad seed, his followers, the sons of the evil one.

Dr Luther had this joke. Except it really isn’t a joke. “Where God builds a church there the devil would also build a chapel.” And, of course, that makes so much sense. The devil isn’t interested in being active in the world. The world already is his.

What he cannot stand is those sons and daughters of the Kingdom. They, or we should say, us – we are his main target. And we are warned about this in the Scriptures numerous times. Jesus: **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** [Matt 7:15].

Paul: **“Fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”** [Acts 20:29]

Peter: **“There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.”** [2 Pet 2:1] John: **“Now many antichrists have come. [...] They went out from us, but they were not of us.”** [1 John 2:18-19]

We can learn how even the holy apostles and those they sent were opposed and attacked in those congregations which they had founded. The Augsburg Confession, the foundational document of the Lutheran church, also speaks about these unpleasant

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realities often. “For we grant that in this life hypocrites and wicked people have been mingled with the Church, and that they are members of the Church...” [ACA, VII and VIII] That is the current state of affairs in Christ’s Church.

We may have our expectation for what the Church is supposed to be and look like. We may hope that the Church would be such a community of God’s people where we love one another as Jesus loved us, where we live out in our community and in our lives all the beautiful apostolic exhortations from the Scriptures.

We certainly should strive to do that. All of us. All of that. There is no excuse for us not to devote our efforts to new lives in Christ. No excuse at all. The Triune God reveals His will to us in His Word; He faithfully fills us with His Holy Spirit so that we would gladly listen to Him, learn and live our beautiful new lives in Christ.

How does the Church look in reality? How do we look in reality? It may seem disappointing. And we may be zealous to make her more like the Church should be. Great aspirations! Noble intentions! We should pray that we will succeed, by God’s grace. But no church, no synod, no congregation will ever be perfect in this age. There will always be more to hope for. Always...

But why? Isn’t our Guy in charge? Hasn’t He received all authority? Why don’t you, Jesus, make us into that radiant, harmonious, gracious, beautiful community where everyone lives guided by Your Word and Spirit? Why?!

Why false teachings? Why conflicts? Why tensions? Why clash of personalities? Why tolerance towards sinful behavior? Why lack of grace and forgiveness? Why indifference? Why ignorance? Why misplaced priorities? Why? The answer is quite unpleasant.

The evil one sows his seed. He surely knows how to pull the strings of our hearts to bring out the worst, but then there are those who belong to him even among God’s people. A very hard saying to stomach. But if that is true, shouldn’t we try to identify those sons of the evil one, shouldn’t we try to weed them out? Isn’t that what you would want us to do, Jesus? I guess every passionate Christian can relate to such sentiment. And what about Jesus? “No! Leave it as it is.” What?!

“Leave them!” **“Let both grow together until the harvest [...] Then the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace.”** Until then, leave them...

Jesus is not indifferent. If you doubt, remember, He **“emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant [...] He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** [Phil 2:7-8] That’s not indifference. That’s passionate love and care. Our gracious Lord Jesus doesn’t want anyone to perish but all to come to the knowledge of the truth and to have eternal life.

He knows how closely we all are connected together. How intimately our lives are entangled in this world. He doesn’t want anyone to be pulled out by accident. Each one of His brothers and sisters, each one of you is too precious for Him to risk losing you.

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Jesus' focus is on caring and helping the wheat to grow, not on weeding, not in this age anyway. And this may be something we as Christians also need to consider. When we are passionate about the Gospel, we may let our focus slip. As we care for pure teaching of the Gospel, for the Law and Gospel, and we should do it as faithfully as we can, we should be mindful that we use the Word of God properly - to care for and to build up God's people.

Not to swing the Word trying to cut down all the weeds. It may be tempting to use the clear and comforting doctrine that we have received in our Lutheran Church to elevate ourselves – “see how good our teaching is!” - when our Lord has given it to us as means of His grace, so that we would use it to extend God's grace to everyone.

This parable of the Weeds unveils for us once again God loving heart, His gracious attitude, His incredible patience, and how much He values each one of us. How much He values you! He always keeps focus on our ultimate destination, New Heavens and New Earth. Everything serves that purpose, to bring all His people safely home.

If we understand this, then we will also see the Church in this age differently. We won't let our personal expectations disappoint us. Then we may be able to see the Church as the Lord of the Church sees it, rejoicing in everything good. And there is so much!

We should marvel about the fact that we are here. For we are here by God's grace alone, that is His work in us, His patience with us. It is Him who brings us together, who binds us by means of His Spirit into this otherworldly fellowship of saints.

It is Him who speaks to us His life-giving words and feeds us forgiveness and eternal life. It is the Triune God who keeps calling new and new people by the Gospel, who keeps bringing more forgiven sinners into His fold, just as imperfect and just as loved as we all are. Today we have four of them joining us. What a joy! All those are proper miracles.

They are beautiful, comforting and hopeful. He has changed your lives. He keeps blessing others through you; He keeps blessing us and this place through this congregation. We should celebrate, for despite the enemy's mightiest efforts, and mighty they are, the good seed that the Son of Man sowed keeps growing and producing an abundant harvest.

How can we not marvel and be grateful?! Jesus has all authority; He does reign in His grace and wisdom. Things may sometimes seem disappointing from our perspective. That's okay. We often don't get things right. But the day is coming when Jesus Himself will do the weeding. **“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”** Everything will be as it is supposed to be. **“Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”** [Rev 21:4] That is Jesus' promise. That is our hope.

Meanwhile, I pray that the Holy Spirit shapes how we see Christ's Church and our congregation, not with disappointment, but with wonder and gratitude, not despairing but hopeful awaiting the day when the Kingdom will be fully revealed. What you will see on that day will exceed all your expectations. No disappointments at all.

That is most certainly true. Amen.