

Season after PENTECOST

Prayer

Collect of the Day

O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your final judgement, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You in perfect joy hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one now God, and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 119:57-64 (antiphon v. 89)
Isaiah 44:6-8
Romans 8:18-27
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 772 *or* 773
Other Hymns – 564 (OT), 650 (E), 659 (G), 921

Almighty God, we are too quick to judge Your ways and too bold to presume upon Your wisdom. Grant us grace so that we may trust in Your Word and fulfil our baptismal vocation of worship, witness, prayer and works of mercy, both to our families and to our neighbours in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Lord, we are stewards of Your creation, but we have often squandered its goodness and wasted its resources. Guide us to use wisely and for the benefit of all people the fruits of this good earth, and preserve its goodness for those to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, we have been given new birth in Baptism. Help us to confess Your Son before the world, reflecting the glory of Your kingdom to all people. Bless all pastors, missionaries and church workers, that they may be faithful in their callings. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, we enjoy great freedom and blessing in our land. Bless our prime minister, the parliament, our premier, and all those who make, judge and administer laws in our land. Give them wisdom in their actions for the protection of life and livelihood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we give You thanks for the gift of health, which we must never take for granted. Hear our prayers on behalf of the sick, the aged, the infirm, those who mourn and those near death. Grant them healing in accord with Your will and grace to sustain them in their need. Hear us especially for _____. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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Holy Lord, we too easily forget those in nursing homes, assisted living and the homebound. Give us grace so that we may bring them Your consolation and peace, and give them the aid and comfort of Your Word and our fellowship in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we are wounded by the sufferings of this life, and we need Your grace to sustain us in hope and equip us with patience. Give to us all that we need to pass through the day of trouble and be found faithful when Christ comes in His glory at the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gentle Lord, we ask You to visit the homes of Your people, that they may be places of blessing and love, where faith is nurtured and we learn to live out our new lives in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, hear us on behalf of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Grant that what we pray for, we may work toward, under the guidance of Your Holy Spirit, that at the Day of Judgment we may be found worthy to join the saints and enter into Your gift of eternal light and life forevermore; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

“Premature Weeding”

Do you have a ‘green thumb’? Many people have the ability to make plants and flowers, fruits and vegetables grow. Some have this uncanny ability to coax nearly dead plants back to life. Others seem to cultivate bountiful, weed-free gardens that year-after-year produce healthy and abundant fruit and vegetables even if the weather isn’t favourable. Still others can’t seem to get anything to grow no matter how hard they work at it. Whether it’s the kind of seed, cultivation methods or fertiliser used, nothing seems to grow or flourish for these people. You know which kind of person you are!

In today’s Gospel Reading, Jesus tells a parable about spiritual gardening. In particular, He warns us about spiritual, premature weeding – attempting to separate wheat from weeds, to look into a person’s heart and determine which one they are. But the fact of the matter is that it’s impossible to tell the difference between wheat and weeds . . . between Christians and those only pretending to be God’s people; because only Jesus is able to see a person’s true heart condition.

Jesus’ parable is one to which many people of His day could relate. *“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.”* Older translations of the Bible refer to these weeds as ‘tares,’ but the botanical name for this weed is ‘darnel.’ This was such a hideous weed because it looked so much like wheat that only an expert could tell the difference. Unfortunately, that difference was only detected when the weed began to germinate and bear fruit. Because this weed was just as hardy as wheat and because their roots were intertwined, you couldn’t pull it out of the ground without pulling the wheat along with it. In Biblical times and even later, people would purposely sow this weed in the field of a person they didn’t like. There was even a Roman law making it a crime for anyone from playing such a vengeful trick.

Jesus interprets the parable for His disciples and us this way: *“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the children 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 close of the age, and the reapers are angels.”* The evil one – the devil – is the one who produces these weeds as he leads people away from following Christ. Like darnel, these people look just like healthy wheat . . . like any Christian. They may sound like any Christian . . . they may even do good deeds like any Christian; but they are hypocrites – doing all the right things for all the wrong reasons. They don’t really believe in Jesus. In their hearts they may even ridicule our Lord and the Christian faith, but outwardly they act just like any Christian. That’s why we can’t tell the difference. We can’t look into their heart and see what they really believe. These people were planted initially by the Son of man as *“good seed,”* but the temptations of the devil, the cares of this world, and the sinfulness of the human heart has lured them away from Christ to become weeds.

Another way the devil tries to ruin God’s crop is to turn Christians against each other. Since we can’t look into another person’s heart and determine if they are weeds or wheat, we judge them through comparisons. Such a pastime is great fun, isn’t it? We’ve all done it from time to time. “Lord, see that person over there? He can’t be as good a Christian as the rest of us because he doesn’t have a smile on his face when he’s at church. Or what about that person over there, Lord? She doesn’t attend Bible Class, so obviously she is an inferior Christian. Pastor, do you know what a terrible sin that person committed? They should be weeded out, kicked out of the church for what they’ve done. And what about the person who sings so loud, or prays so loud in church? That’s not devotion, it’s self-righteousness. Might as well hang a sign around their neck proclaiming how holy they are. Surely that person who is always whining has a negative attitude, and who speaks against everything at voters’ meetings can’t be part of Your kingdom.”

How the devil tempts us to do some premature weeding! But we can’t tell the difference because the weeds and wheat look the same. Only God can look into the heart to see the true condition. In fact according to Jesus’ parable, we are not the ones who do the weeding. Jesus sends His angels to do that on Judgment Day. So He says: *“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.’”*

Now, since we are unable to diagnose the condition of a person’s heart, we need to be content and leave the final weeding to our Saviour on Judgment Day when *“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.”* Only on the Day of Judgment will the *“sons of the evil one”* be exposed for who they truly are – unrepentant sinners who have rejected Christ and His Word. They will receive their award, inheriting the kingdom prepared for Satan – a terrible, fiery torment . . . a place of

eternal weeping, pain, and sorrow. Like unwanted weeds, these people will be bundled up and sent into hell to suffer for all eternity as the just punishment for their sins.

For those, however, who are wheat in the kingdom, Jesus promises this future on Judgment Day: *“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”* By believing in Jesus as our Saviour, we are children of our heavenly Father. And as such, we now inherit the forgiveness, life and salvation that He earned for us by His atoning death on the cross and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. You see, Jesus was ‘planted’ in this world by means of His incarnation and subsequent birth in Bethlehem just as the wheat in our parable was planted. He took on a human nature like ours, yet without the sin that so mars our nature. As Jesus was tempted by Satan, our Saviour knows the temptations the devil throws at us – to deny Him and become imitation wheat. The writer to the Hebrews thus says of Him: *“For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”* At His crucifixion, Jesus, the Sower-become-seed, was made to be a weed for us. He was treated as a weed when His heavenly Father rejected Him as He bore your sin and mine. Then He was ‘planted’ like a seed in the soil – *“crucified, dead, and buried”* in the words of the Apostles’ Creed. By His resurrection from the dead our Saviour proved that a sinless seed had to die in order to bring about a blessed harvest in all people, even as He had said: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* And as we are resurrected with Christ for an eternity in heaven, we will shine not only like the sun, but we will shine like the Son with glorified bodies, perfect as God meant us to be from at the beginning of creation.

And Jesus has indeed born much fruit for you and me. All who believe in Him are declared ‘not guilty’ of their sin, and receive the gift of eternal life. On Judgment Day He will say to the ‘wheat’ . . . to people like you and me, *“Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* Not that He has to do this for us, but He does so simply because He loves us. He is the one who does the planting. And everything good about the ‘good seed’ is His doing, not the seed’s. The inheritance He offers us is simply that – an inheritance . . . something that we cannot earn or deserve. His love is also shown in the fact that He prevents any premature weeding of the weeds that Satan sows among the wheat, lest such action endanger the welfare of the good seed while it’s still growing. Even more, for this time of grace He even gives the weeds opportunity to repent and turn again to His love and mercy.

And until that time when He calls us home, we thus live our lives as good wheat in this world. Although we often experience the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh to become weeds; our Saviour gives us the strength to resist these temptations as we immerse ourselves in His holy Word, being continually reminded of His promises. Our faith is further strengthened as we remember our Baptism, and how through water and His powerful Word, He has claimed us as His own. And as we receive often the Sacrament of Holy Communion – His very body and blood in, with and under bread and wine, our faith is kept strong in order to meet the challenges of daily living. And we are thus empowered by the love of Christ

to show that love to everyone in word and deed – even to the weeds . . . like good wheat planted by Christ that bears good fruit. So the apostle Paul encourages us: *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”*

To that end may our gracious Lord keep us in our faith as good wheat until the final harvest day.
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.