

The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost – 2020

Isaiah 44:6-8

Romans 8:18-27

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

We are gathered here, together, in this magnificent courtyard, on this radiant morning for one defining reason – the King of humanity, the Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, who was crucified for the sins of the world, who bore the iniquity of every single one of you, this crucified King rose from the dead – on a Sunday. He lives. Death could not hold the holy Son of God. Death is defeated, crushed beneath a nail-pierced foot. He lives. There is no triumph like this triumph. It is defining. His sacrifice extends to the farthest reaches of the earth, invading the broken hearts of men to make them whole. Resurrection defines this place, this hour, this community. We have been claimed by blood and love and Spirit. God intervened in our wretched estate and we have been delivered from sin, from death and from the devil. Jesus' righteousness is given to you as a gift, pure grace, and you are treasured by our heavenly Father. We are compelled to be here. Faith compels us to recognize what is true and act on it. God has awakened faith in you by the power of His Word and that faith is a force that has drawn you to this place, at this hour to celebrate the event that towers over time – Christ is risen. Life is enlarged. Heaven is our home.

There was a young lass in my study here at church yesterday morning – your sister in the faith, a saint of Christ the King. She was distressed. The lament that spilled out of her mouth came straight from her heart. “We don't agree on anything.” She wasn't speaking about me and her – we are fast friends, but she was speaking about the tumult around us, the tug and pull of politics, the obvious fracture of our society, the divisiveness that seems to be breeding because of the pandemic. You feel it. It is a burden. Harmony is a balm to the soul. Unity is a treasure to be nurtured. It's time to reassert first things. Unity comes from above.

We agree. You and I are poor, miserable sinners. We have failed to love God above all things. We have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves. We agree. Man was created in God's image. Out of pure love did He craft Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from one of Adam's ribs. We agree. God does not despise humanity, even in our sin, He comes looking for us, to reclaim us, to make us His own, to draw us unto Himself and be our Father. We agree. He sent His Son. That's how He looks for us. He sent His Son into our flesh, into this broken creation, to reveal His nature, to suffer for our sin – paying the fearsome price necessary. We agree. Only He could do this. Only the pure and sinless sacrifice of God's Son on the Holy Cross could make you His own, could cleanse you from your filth, could redeem you, could open heaven. We agree. That sacrifice is where God's unending glory is located. The greatest became the least. He died willingly for He loves God above all things and He loves you, His neighbor, more than Himself. We agree. We don't deserve this love and yet He gives it without condition. We agree.

The Son of God is risen and lavishes the bounty of His resurrection on a world-weary people. We were empty, lost, forlorn and without hope and He has awakened us from the sleep of unbelief and brought us into His kingdom. We agree. He has built His church upon Jesus' death and resurrection and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. We agree. His Word is living

and active and has elevated the hearts of men above the poverty of our selfishness. For two millennia, the church has engaged in ministry that has benefited people across the globe. We agree. The Lord is among us, active to dispense the fruit of forgiveness, to console the broken, to uplift the troubled and to Shepherd us toward our heavenly destiny. We agree. That is beautiful. That is noteworthy. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are in this place, in agreement regarding the magnificent things of God. That agreement is not of human origin. It comes from above. It is our joy to luxuriate in it. It is our responsibility to cultivate it, protect it.

There is one more thing about which we are in agreement. This world can be a difficult place. Evil is among us. There are enemies of the cross. They want to deprive us of our life in Christ, take our attention away from His Word and put it anywhere else. Jesus tells a parable to enlighten your eyes as to what is around you. The parable of the wheat and the tares, the parable of the wheat and the weeds; it is relevant. This parable equips you to see the kingdom aright.

A farmer sowed good seed in his field. While he and his workers slept during the night, his enemy slipped into the field under cover of darkness and sowed weeds. No one is the wiser until the seeds sprout and the plants begin to bear fruit. Then the shocking truth is revealed: Weeds among the wheat! The servants can't believe their eyes. They question the owner: "Didn't you plant good seed? Where did the weeds come from?" They propose a solution. Pull up the weeds before it is too late. But the farmer has an entirely different approach. Let everything grow together in one field, the weeds and the wheat, until the harvest. Then they will be sorted – weeds into the fire, wheat into the barn.

This is one of only two parables for which we have an interpretation directly from Jesus Himself. The farmer is the Son of Man – the Lord Christ. The enemy is the devil. The field is the world. The wheat are the sons of the kingdom, those who hear the Word of forgiveness which is anchored in Jesus' death and resurrection and cling to it through faith in Him. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. The harvest is the end of the age. The reapers are the angels. Separation or judgment comes at the end of the age. What was sown by the devil will be thrown into the fiery furnace of hell. The wheat will shine like the sun in the kingdom of heaven.

That is the world you live in. Believe it. Believers and unbelievers living on the same street, the same neighborhood, the same city – working together, paying taxes together, our kids in the same schools, going to see the same dentist, pushing carts together at Stater Bros., breaking the speed limit together on the same freeway. You are the wheat. Sometimes you behave like weeds but you are the wheat. The Farmer is totally interested in bringing you home. God will do nothing to put bringing you home at risk. In the Farmer's eyes, the weeds are an annoyance, nothing more. The well-being of the wheat is paramount and the Farmer has that in hand. That is God looking out for you in this life – ensuring that you hear His Word, that you receive what He wills to give you in His Son. That is what ensures that you are safe; His Word, faith, the faith that God has breathed into you by that Word, it makes you impervious to anything truly destructive – it's all that the Farmer in the parable focuses on.

The servants ask the wrong question with the wrong attitude. Do you hear their snarky attitude? "Didn't you sow good seed?" It is a hostile query, calling into question the competency of the sower. Is that you? I know that it's me, but is it you? Do you doubt God's intent in the world?

Would you be His counselor, telling Him how He should handle this problem? Do you have the pride to question His plans, His methods, His design? Yes, you do. Tell me, what good comes of that? You are a prideful little thing; as am I. You get nervous with His plan; you would improve it, alter it, enhance it with your enlightened sensibilities. What does He say to us? “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Be still... what does it mean to be still, spiritually? It means to listen, do not make noise, be calm, and pay attention. It means stop paying so much attention to what is going on in the world, and listen to what the Bible is telling you.

Your faith has been strained, under attack. Diversions in life abound perpetually but we are in a season of outsized diversions and the noise around us is deafening. This parable is calling for you to trust – to trust the Master is at work, even as faithlessness surrounds us and barks and the harvest seems at risk. It is not. Be still and know that I am God. We are agreed. Sharen Ross is agreed. She fell into the eternal embrace of the risen King yesterday. She is sheltered in the Master’s barn. Home. This dear woman is agreed – the Lord is risen and death has no sting. She is agreed. Her cup of divine grace runneth over. Sharen is agreed. She has walked through the valley of the shadow of death, she fears no evil – Christ is with her and she is with Christ. That is the unity which is practiced here, enjoyed here, treasured here – us with Him and Him with us. Please tell me, are we all agreed?