

*Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 17.vii.2005, 9:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Chanceford Township, York Co., Pennsylvania
Isaiah 44:6-8; Psalm 86:11-17; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30,36-43
Ante-Communion, LBW Setting 2*

*Jesu Juva !**

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

“ . . . and the reapers are the angels.”

--Matthew 13:39c

In the long section in the Synoptic Gospels containing so much of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven in parables, there are five of these stories found only in the Gospel of Matthew. The first and longest of these is today's Gospel, the parable of the good field of wheat sabotaged by an enemy, who sowed weeds in that field. Then there is the parable of the yeast and the dough (v. 33), the parable of the treasure hidden in field (v. 44), the parable of the merchant in search of fine pearls (vv. 45,46), and, finally, the parable of the net and the great catch of fish (vv. 47-49). These five parables, taken together, stand for us as a sign of warning and of hope, just as they did for the community of Saint Matthew the Apostle. May God the Holy Spirit permit us to hear *both* of those Words of God to us

today, God's Word of warning and God's Word of hope, God's Word of Law and God's Word of Gospel. They describe in word pictures, the nature of the Church in every age. ✠ Amen.

It is thought by many scholars that the Christians who associated themselves with the life and teaching of Saint Matthew were Jews in the land of Israel and its border regions, and that they were a community of the third or fourth generation of Christians by the time the First Gospel was written down and collected into one book. That is, they were already part of the Covenant community and the long, long history of God's people, Israel, extending from Abraham forward to the Exodus and the giving of the Law through Moses, the Captivity and the return, the destruction of the first Temple, its rebuilding, the desecration and partial destruction of the Second Temple and its rebuilding and rededication of the Third Temple under the Maccabees and its improvement and expansion under Herod the Great, and that they had witnessed the destruction of the Third Temple at the end of the First Jewish War with Rome in AD 70 CE. They were the few believers in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah among the majority of Hebrew individuals and

congregations who did not accept Jesus as God's Anointed bringer of the fulfillment of God's justice and peace. 'Why?' they must have thought and asked one another, 'did so few of their brothers and sisters, so few members of some of their own families, believe that the Kingdom of Heaven was coming into the world through Jesus?'

But, on the other hand, as third or fourth generation Christians, they were now the many believers in Jesus compared to the very few first believers. Faith in the Nazarene was not only *their* faith. For many of them, it was also the faith of their parents, their grandparents and even their great-grandparents, a faith to be taken seriously, but also a faith which could be taken for granted. They were, in that respect, Christians remarkably like us. And the fact that Matthew's Gospel contains more teaching about material riches than any other of the four Gospels many also indicate that the Christian community that gave rise to this Gospel was somewhat prosperous, and perhaps somewhat complacent. In this respect, too, we are not unlike them, for even the materially poorest among us are rich beyond imagining when seen through the eyes of the really poor and homeless and abandoned of this world, are we not?

I see indications in these five Matthean parables of the Kingdom of Heaven that these early Christians may also have needed to be reminded that it is God alone and God's special agents with the highest spiritual intelligence, *the Angels*, and not we ourselves, who are to make judgments about who belongs in the Church and who does not, about who will finally live in peace and joy with God for all eternity, and who will not, based not on appearance but on the persons we truly are. We need this Word well. But, thinking back to last Sunday's Parable of the Sower, we also need to be reminded of how God is committed to including us and all humanity in His Kingdom if possible. We need to hear how broad and inclusive the field of God's grace is, how, no matter how the memory of our sins hold us down and the Evil One accuses us, we can rise with the whole Church into a fragrant offering of the bread of faith through just the tiniest bit of God's grace among us, how the Father gives His most precious gift to purchase the whole field of our humanity, even though the treasure of faith is only evident in one small part of it, how we are infinitely precious to the Father, as precious as a priceless pearl to a merchant, how the net of God's mercy is so

immense that those we might not have thought – *and we ourselves*--are caught up in it, not angels, not perfect saints, but those whom God Himself has sought out and drawn to Himself by becoming one of us.

✠Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit both now and forever. ✠Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!***

*'O Jesus, help!' abbrev. 'J.J.!'

**'To God alone be the glory!' abbrev. 'S.D.G.!'