

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost (B), Proper 6 [Father's Day] 18.vi.06
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-6,11-13, II Corinthians 5:1-10 & 14-17; Mark 4:26-34

J. J. !

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

But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest time has come.

-- Mark 4:29

Today's Gospel and its beginning, the 'Parable of the Seed Growing Hidden in a Field,' is part of a long discourse by Our Lord which all three Synoptic Gospels agree were taught to people on the seashore. The discourse as a whole begins in Matthew, Mark and Luke with the 'Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.' We can see the illustration of that parable if we just look out into the fields of wheat and barley all around us. Even modern herbicides cannot prevent a few 'tares' from peeking up over the heads of wheat and barley.

Whereas the 'Parables of Seedtime and Harvest' make perfect sense to us land-lubbers, surrounded by and some of us still making our living on this productive land, I wonder how many of Jesus' hearers

knew about how crops are planted and harvested. Perhaps that was a way Our Lord had of getting our attention, telling us a story about people and situations *different* from our own experience, telling farming stories to fishermen and fishing stories to farmers, and telling a story about a certain Samaritan to those who distrusted *all* Samaritans.

Jesus' telling of the 'Parable of the Good Seed Growing Secretly in a Field' in today's Gospel is mentioned only by Mark. Of course, a farmer can relate to the experience of seeing grain growing where some seed was spilled at planting on the way from the barn to the field. And gardeners know how squirrels seem to have different ideas about where flower bulbs ought to be planted as we find crocuses, daffodils, tulips and other perennials not only where we knew they were growing but also where we would never have thought of planting them. Unless we are *very* particular in our gardening, we usually let the squirrels do their landscaping while we do ours. In my own case, it's a toss-up which looks better.

But the planter and the seed that grows in today's Gospel is different from that. This planter deliberately *sows* seed in a field, but

then *appears* to forget all about it. He sleeps. He goes about his business. It seems for all the world as though he neither knows nor cares about the life he has planted in the earth. Martin Luther must have been thinking about this parable when at the dinner table some visitor asked him, “How did you manage to bring off that whole Reformation business, Dr. Luther?” Luther’s answer may make some of us blush, but it shows an unshakeable confidence in God’s faithfulness toward the Church. “*I didn’t do anything,*” the Reformer replied. “Old Von Ambsdorf and I just sat around drinking good Einbeck Pilsener, and the Holy Spirit did the rest.”

The seed sprouts into tiny plants. The sower takes no notice. The tiny plants leaf out. The sower has gone fishing. The plants bud out with grain—*still* the farmer in today’s Gospel seems to do *nothing!* But, as soon as that grain is ripe, the sower is *right there with his sickle*, not losing even a little bit of the crop he had planted, bringing it all into his barn.

Why would Mark’s community have remembered this

parable while others did not? The fact that this parable is in Mark's Gospel reinforces the idea that Mark's community, probably at Rome, right there in the belly of the beast of persecution that was Rome and Emperor Nero, consisted of Christians who wondered, understandably, whether the God Who had planted the seed of faith in them by the Holy Spirit had done that on purpose, by accident or on a sort of whim. They wondered this because innocent people were dying violent deaths because they bore the name 'Jew' or the new name, 'Christian.' They wondered whether Christ was indeed coming back for them, or what it meant to confess such faith as they did in what would become the Apostles' Creed. They wondered whether God had forgotten all about them.

Sometimes, under more mundane circumstances, do we not find ourselves asking something like that question? What, after all, does the Holy Trinity have in mind for us in that usually long expanse of time between our first birth to eternal life in Holy Baptism and our second rebirth into God's presence at the hour of our death? There have been moments in times of trouble when I have felt God's presence and

purpose intensely, but what about now, when things are going pretty well, now, in the midst of life, when I may wonder how important it is to even concern myself with God? Does God concern Himself with me? Does God concern Himself with this world He has created and sustains, but which He seems to leave to its own devices?

According to the Parable of the Good Seed Growing Secretly in the Field, *yes, indeed, God cares! Yes, indeed, God has a plan for every child of Eve born into this world and, NO, the Triune God, that absolutely one community of love, never loses sight of faith and its fruits, hope and love, wherever they are planted and growing, despite some appearances to the contrary. Your Heavenly Father will not let one, single particle of faith go to waste. Like a good father, as a good Father, our gracious God watches us without appearing to, letting us fail and loving us just the same, letting us grow strong and wise through failure with the courage to repent and begin again, and again, and again. But God will use faith that ripens into hope and love to extend the Kingdom of His love in this world. As soon as that faith has achieved all the maturity it can in this life, so it would seem, so Our Lord'*

Parable would seem to suggest, our whole life will be gathered into God's Kingdom forever, where nothing can threaten it, where we can shine as praise before God's face forever.

I imagine that was a tremendous comfort to those Christians at Rome, to those Christians of John Mark's community, as they saw their members and leaders—leaders like the Apostles Peter and Paul—gathered from this life, and as they looked to their own passage through the gate of the Cross. I imagine that the teaching that God has not lost sight of us and that we will not be lost to God is a comfort to anyone who has experienced loss and the sorrow of being left behind. I don't imagine that. I *know* it. And I believe that this is Good News we can carry with us throughout our lives and right into the doctor's office and through the battery of tests and treatments and appointments almost without end or through whatever process signals a turn in the road up ahead. For the LORD of the Harvest may appear to be asleep, while He is anything *but* slumbering. ✠ Amen.

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

S. D. G. !