Text: Matthew 13:24-45

**Introduction**

According to tradition, the Gospel of Matthew was the first one written. That is why it gets slotted first. The order of the gospels in your bibles are the order in which they were received. Unfortunately that is not the same for the letters of Paul. Those are just ordered by length. But then when these things started to circulate they were as individual works and the original books were the Gospels separate from the letters. Eventually coming together in the New Testament. All of the Gospels had a Catechetical purpose, to teach the faith and the life of one that faith rests upon. But Matthew’s leans into the teaching purpose. It is not the only way, but there is definitely a way where Mark, Luke and John can all be read as commentaries on Matthew or catechism that bring out some themes present in Matthew, but not emphasized. For example, the theme of the Gospel being for the gentiles as well, is in Matthew in the great commission – “Make disciples of all nations…”. Luke in his gospel highlights Jesus not just as the Son of Abraham and the Son of David – Matthew’s emphasis – but the Son of Adam, and the Son of God. Luke highlights gentiles who interacted with and believed in Jesus during his ministry.

I highlight that because I think it helps in reading Matthew to understand that his account is often attempting to answer basic questions of the faith. You can imagine someone hearing the early proclamation who might ask: How does one live this faith? And Matthew re-tells the first of the Jesus’ sermons – the Sermon on the Mount. Why to you send people out to preach? And Matthew would retell the missionary discourse. But then you might get to some deeper questions. Why is the reception of that preaching so different? A sower when out to sow. But eventually you might get questions like: where has this evil come from? Or if this is the all powerful God, why is there evil in the world?

**Text**

And it would be to those type of questions that Matthew might start, “He put another parable before them…”. And again, like last week with the parable of the sower having important sandwiched in between the parable and the explanation that our lectionary dropped, so too this week. The dropped stuff this week are a couple of short parables that refine the wheat and weeds and a statement. The statement is that the parables are the fulfillment of “I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.” The parables in general, but maybe especially this one, are a revelation of how things have been since the beginning.

If the world was created good and God himself is good and he loves us, how is there evil in the world?

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.” The repeated refrain of Genesis 1 – “and God saw that it was good. It was evening and morning…” – is not wrong. When God the creator made all things he did indeed use good seed. The fundamental reality of creation is goodness. “But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.” So how did evil enter into this world? Two points here. First God has an enemy. And second, that enemy is given passive permission. God doesn’t order the enemy, but neither does God wake up his troops at the first sowing. “While his men were sleeping.”

Evil enters this creation because it was already out there in some way. C.S. Lewis in his Narnia books has Aslan singing Narnia into being. And of course Narnia is not the only creation. There were many. But already as those first notes of creation are going out, discordant notes are heard. And in that case they came from the character Jadis, the white witch, who after ruining her world has set out to ruin Narnia.

Where does evil in our world come from? God – therefore the people of God – has an enemy who sows weeds. More than this about the origin of Satan we do not know. Lewis’ speculation is interesting. The mystics might tell you something like a questioning of goodness is a necessary thing to know that it is good. The evil is the necessary shadow. Not in a yin and yang or Manichean way where evil is the equal to the good. But that which allows all to know the goodness. The first question of the servants – the ones who had fallen asleep – is directed at the sower, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?” It's a necessary question. But also notice that this master doesn’t respond “You idiots fell asleep and let it in.” He simply says, “An enemy has done this.” And they do not question his answer. Their only question is “What do we do?”

**Christology**

When we are asking the question of evil – “why are these weeds here? Did you really use good seed?” – we are admitting one thing and asking another. We are admitting that this is beyond us. As long as we think we could make it better ourselves, we don’t ask that question. We don’t go looking for someone to blame. The problem of evil hits us with its full force when we’ve reached the limits of our power. And it isn’t enough. We look at the world and despair. And that admission is always asking the question, “did you do this? Do you intend to do anything about this?”

And the answer of our parable today is have faith. “At the harvest I will tell the reapers, gather the weeds first in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” The evil in this world cannot overpower the good. The wheat still grows. There will still be a harvest. The owner is able to separate things out. The enemy and all his works will be destroyed. Does God intend to do something? Yes. “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…then the righteous will shine like the sun.” Evil will receive its solution at the end. Until then have faith.

And it is here where the two short parables are also helpful. Because you can image a response to that flat teaching to be something like “that ain’t good enough. Have you looked at your field? There will not be a harvest. The weeds have taken over everything.” Jesus tells them “the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed.” The proclamation of grace – of the forgiveness of sins, of the cross, of the resurrection…of hope. Yeah, I’ve looked at the world and know the weeds. And the final victory is assured. But right now take heart. The Kingdom of Heaven has overplanted its own weed like thing. Christ has won, your sins are forgiven. Hope has a way of growing and giving shade “so that the birds of the air come and make nests.”

Ok, but the World is so large, and we are so small. Right now it is really hard to see. “The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven that a woman who took and hid in three measure of flour, until it is all leavened.” Trust me, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. I can be just as sneaky as the enemy. It might take a lifetime for an individual to leaven. It always starts small. Maybe especially after it has been punched down in proofing. And you can’t see the leaven, but it’s there. Hope works its way throughout. And you have Hope in Christ. The World has hope in Christ.

**Moral**

Let’s return to those servant’s question. I paraphrased it as “what do we do?” It is more explicit, “Do you want us to go and gather the weeds?”

God response is “no.” And he gives them two reasons. “You might root up the wheat.” And “wait for the harvest reapers.”

I mentioned with last week’s parable of the sower and the soils, one of the take aways is that we are not competent to judge the soils, which is why the seed is thrown everywhere. You get something of the same idea hear. We are not competent to judge wheat and weeds while growing. And even if we could, pulling up one might kill the other at the root.

If Satan can’t tempt us with sin itself, the next temptation is often pride at how good we can be. And that pride can often bubble over into judgement. And what the parables consistently tell us is that the judgment is not ours. Instead they direct our attention to a couple of different questions.

The first one I’d ask is “am I sure I’m not sleeping.” Jesus consistently tells his disciples to watch. The Sermon on the Mount has plenty of things for a disciple to do in themselves before worrying about pulling up “the weeds”. Before worrying about the weeds, ensure I am being fruitful.

And if I’m looking for something to do outside myself? We can always go and plant mustard seeds. We can always go and work some leaven. We can proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

**Eschatological**

The wheat and the weeds is a parable about good and evil. It looks hopelessly messed up. It might even look impossible. But look again. Do you see the mustard seeds of hope? Do we see the leaven of the forgiveness of sins? There will be a harvest. Those angels on the last day will not be without work. Christ has won and given to us the victory.

The calling right now is not to hasten the end. The calling right now is to encourage the growth in hope of the harvest. Amen.