

Sermon: 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43: The parable of the weeds

Theme: God's patience

Goal: We have to stand firm (as God's wheat) to the end, in spite of the weeds that grow side-by-side among the Christians.

Dear Friends,

**Introduction:** We have here a second parable of Jesus in this Chapter 13 of Matthew, with similar elements as in the first parable about the Sower and the four types of soil, as we heard last Sunday. But Jesus' teaching has a different goal here. He is warning us, on the one hand; and He is showing His big patience, on the other hand. We need to be aware about this reality of the Church living in the world, the wheat among the weeds.

### **I – The enemy:**

God does His good job constantly, sowing the good seed in the world and establishing His church all around the different countries. He established His church among us as well. But the enemy, the devil, is always ready to disturb and to sabotage God's good work, sowing the seeds of weed among the wheat.

The devil was a very popular character in the Middle Age, and we can see his portraits in several pictures like a man with goat's feet and a tail and horns. The traditional African religions have lots of spirits, and the devil is a strong reality in the daily life of people in the tribes. But in our current culture, the devil is like a myth for many, or a fancy “friend” that some extreme groups even worship...

The devil was very active in Jesus' time, trying to disturb Jesus' ministry. We have several reports in the Gospels about confrontations between

Jesus and the devil. The devil is a real spirit, an angel that fell from his original status, and became enemy of God, as Jesus describes him in our text. We cannot ignore him, but we shall not be afraid of him. Jesus is the Victor over the devil, and Jesus is on the side of His children to give us strength against the devil and victory over his temptations.

But he is still active, and very active! One of his strategies is just to work “at night” (like in our text), in the darkness, in a dissimulated way, so that no one will notice it, until the bad result appears. Another strategy is that he tries to be ignored, so that people will not be aware that he is working and trying to hinder God's good plans for us. The Apostle Peter warns us saying: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Our text says: “But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.” The enemy likes to disturb God's work. He sows everything among the Christians that can hinder the good growth of God's farm, God's church. Believers are living side-by-side with unbelievers. Usually it's impossible to distinguish one from another when you walk in the street, or in the shopping mall, or elsewhere. Wheat and weed are very similar in the first stage of growth. You cannot see the faith stamped or written on the face of someone. Even in the church; we suppose that all are Christians, thus good seeds. But the history shows us that several times false Christians were mixed with true Christians, causing extensive damage to the fellowship of the visible church. What can we do?

## **II – God's patience:**

In the past, specially in the Middle Age, the established church used the sword to eliminate the weed. They tried to pull up the weeds by force, killing lots of heretics, or alleged heretics. It didn't solve the problem and caused big damages to the image of the church and to the church

herself.

Jesus shows us God's plan and how God handles this situation. When the owner's workers wanted to pull up the weed, the owner said: “No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

Peter's explanation about the patience of God is the following: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8).

It is impossible to pull up all the weeds without damaging the wheat. The roots are mixed down in the soil in the form of family relationships and by friendships. And we are not the judges. God is the Sovereign Judge and He knows who is wheat and who is weeds. Paul affirms: “God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19).

The church committed lots of mistakes, trying to anticipate the judgment of some people; not only during the Inquisition, but in recent days as well. Of course, if someone has a behavior or a doctrine totally contrary to God's will, he cannot be allowed to be a member of the church. But the first step is always to call that person to repentance and to the true faith, and not to be quick to make a general judgment. Jesus named three steps to be followed in Matthew 18:15-17, how to handle an impenitent sinner. Patience, patience, and patience again...

God's main goal is to save, and not to condemn. “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son... For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him” (John 3:16-17). He was reconciled with humankind by Jesus' death and resurrection. He spreads this Good News as a good seed in His field, the world. The seeds need time to grow and to produce fruits.

God knows the right time for everything. In spite of the rapid growth of the weeds, He is patient. When it is time for the harvest, He will send His angels to separate the weeds from the wheat. The weeds will be thrown into the fire, but the wheat will be collected in God's barn. “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ear, let him hear.”

My brother-in-law asked my mother why do the wicked grow so fast and why is the world becoming worst and worst. She answered: You have experience in the farm. You know that weeds usually grow faster than potatoes or corn... - “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matt 7:16) said Jesus, warning against the false prophets. Perhaps some fruit are not evident till now. But God knows the time of the harvest.

**Conclusion:** To conclude, I share a text from the African Bible Commentary with you (p. 1138): *“The parable is not about the immediate triumph of the believers and the pure church, but about patient waiting until God's purpose are worked out and He brings history to its final conclusion. In particular, this parable makes it plain that it is pointless to search for a perfect local church and denomination. There will always be weeds in the crop. Moreover, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between those who are of the kingdom and those who are not. We must, therefore, not be quick to judge, as we can easily make mistakes and damage the good seed. We must exercise patience and caution until God, the only Judge, finally decides to wind up history and makes the final decision between those who are His and those who are not. He alone knows those who are called by His name.”*

This is our comfort: God knows His children. God knows our heart. *“We shall fear, love, and trust in God above all things”*, explains Luther in the First commandment. He only is our God and Father through Jesus Christ. Our hope is in him. He will gather the good seed and bring us into His barn. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 17 July 2011