

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany;

Matthew 13:24-30

The Parable of the Tares

Mat 13:24-30

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

1. The Saviour himself explained this parable in the same chapter upon the request of his disciples and says: He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. These seven points of explanation comprehend and clearly set forth what Christ meant by this parable. But who could have discovered such an interpretation, seeing that in this parable he calls people the seed and the world the field; although in the parable preceding this one he defines the seed to be the Word of God and the field the people or the hearts of the people. If Christ himself had not here interpreted this parable every one would have imitated his explanation of the preceding parable and considered the seed to be the Word of God, and thus the Saviour's object and understanding of it would have been lost.

2. Permit me to make an observation here for the benefit of the wise and learned who study the Scriptures. Imitating or guessing is not to be allowed in the explanation of Scripture; but one should and must be sure and firm. Just like Joseph in Gen 40, 12f. interpreted the two dreams of the butler and baker so differently, although they resembled each other, and he did not make the one a copy of the other. True, the danger would not have been great if the seed

had been interpreted to be the Word of God; still had this been the case the parable would not have been thus understood correctly.

3. Now this Gospel teaches us how the kingdom of God or Christianity fares in the world, especially on account of its teaching, namely, that we are not to think that only true Christians and the pure doctrine of God are to dwell upon the earth; but that there must be also false Christians and heretics in order that the true Christians may be approved, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor 11, 19. For this parable treats not of false Christians, who are so only outwardly in their lives, but of those who are unchristian in their doctrine and faith under the name Christian, who beautifully play the hypocrite and work harm. It is a matter of the conscience and not of the hand. And they must be very spiritual servants to be able to identify the tares among the wheat. And the sum of all is that we should not marvel nor be terrified if there spring up among us many different false teachings and false faiths. Satan is constantly among the children of God. Job 1,6.

4. Again this Gospel teaches how we should conduct ourselves toward these heretics and false teachers. We are not to uproot nor destroy them. Here he says publicly let both grow together. We have to do here with God's Word alone; for in this matter he who errs today may find the truth tomorrow. Who knows when the Word of God may touch his heart? But if he be burned at the stake, or otherwise destroyed, it is thereby assured that he can never find the truth; and thus the Word of God is snatched from him, and he must be lost, who otherwise might have been saved. Hence the Lord says here, that the wheat also will be uprooted if we weed out the tares. That is something awful in the eyes of God and never to be justified.

5. From this observe what raging and furious people we have been these many years, in that we desired to force others to believe; the Turks with the sword, heretics with fire, the Jews with death, and thus outroot the tares by our own power, as if we were the ones who could reign over hearts and spirits, and make them pious and right, which God's Word alone must do. But by murder we separate the people from the Word, so that it cannot possibly work upon them and we bring thus with one stroke a double murder upon ourselves, as far as it lies in our power, namely, in that we murder the body for time and the soul for eternity, and afterwards say we did God a service by our actions, and wish to merit something special in heaven.

6. Therefore this passage should in all reason terrify the grand inquisitors and murderers of the people, where they are not brazened faced, even if they have to deal with true heretics. But at present they burn the true saints and are themselves heretics. What is that but uprooting the wheat, and pretending to exterminate the tares, like insane people?

7. Today's Gospel also teaches by this parable that our free will amounts to nothing, since the good seed is sowed only by Christ, and Satan can sow nothing but evil seed; as we also see that the field of itself yields nothing but tares, which the cattle eat, although the field receives them and they make the field green as if they were wheat. In the same way the false Christians among the true Christians are of no use but to feed the world and be food for Satan, and they are so beautifully green and hypocritical, as if they alone were the saints, and hold the place in Christendom as if they were lords there, and the government and highest

places belonged to them; and for no other reason than that they glory that they are Christians and are among Christians in the church of Christ, although they see and confess that they live unchristian lives.

8. In that the Saviour pictures here also Satan scattering his seed while the people sleep and no one sees who did it, he shows how Satan adorns and disguises himself so that he cannot be taken for Satan. As we experienced when Christianity was planted in the world Satan thrust into its midst false teachers. People securely think here God is enthroned without a rival and Satan is a thousand miles away, and no one sees anything except how they parade the Word, name and work of God. That course proves beautifully effective. But when the wheat springs up, then we see the tares, that is, if we are conscientious with God's Word and teach faith, we see that it brings forth fruit, then they go about and antagonize it, and wish to be masters of the field and fear lest only wheat grows in the field, and their interests be overlooked.

9. Then the church and pastor marvel; but they are not allowed to pass judgment, and eagerly wish to interpret all for the best, since such persons bear the Christian name. But it is apparent they are tares and evil seed, have strayed from the faith and fallen to trust in works, and think of rooting out the tares. They lament because of it before the Lord, in the heartfelt prayer of their spirit. For the sower of the good seed says again, they should not uproot it, that is, they should have patience, and suffer such blasphemy, and commend all to God; for although the tares hinder the wheat, yet they make it the more beautiful to behold, compared with the tares, as St. Paul also says in 1 Cor 11, 19: "For there must be false factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you." This is sufficient on today's text.

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