



SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 19, 2020

We are still the body of Christ even though we are unable to gather for public worship during this time of world-wide crisis. While we cannot be together in person around our Lord's Table, we can hear the word of God and hold each other in prayer.

It is an age-old question: Why is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus of Nazareth suggests that both grow together until the harvest. With Paul, we long for the day that all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. Having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly place our hope in the promises of God, and go forth from worship to bear the fruit of justice and mercy.

Prelude

Prelude II: *Cantabile*

Georg Joseph Vogler
(1749-1814)

Hymn

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less



1 My hope is built on noth - ing less than
2 When dark - ness veils his love - ly face, I
3 His oath, his cov - e - nant, his blood sus -
4 When he shall come with trum - pet sound, oh,



Je - sus' blood and righ - teous - ness; no mer - it of my
rest on his un - chang - ing grace; in ev - 'ry high and
tain me in the rag - ing flood; when all sup - ports are
may I then in him be found, clothed in his righ - teous -



own I claim, but whol - ly lean on Je - sus' name.
storm - y gale, my an - chor holds with - in the veil.
washed a - way, he then is all my hope and stay.
ness a - lone, re - deemed to stand be - fore the throne!

Refrain



On Christ, the sol - id rock, I stand; all oth - er ground is sink - ing sand.

Apostolic Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Prayer of the Day

Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

WE GATHER AROUND THE FONT, THE WORD, AND THE PRAYERS

A small group of Holy Trinity members and friends gathered last Sunday afternoon as we welcomed Finley Randall Bonner, son of Kristen (Kenny) and Cole Bonner, into our fellowship through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

First Lesson - Isaiah 44:6–8

*There are no other gods besides God: the word of the Lord does not fail to come to pass.
We can trust in God, through whom Israel—and we—are redeemed.*

⁶Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
⁷Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.
Who has announced from of old the things to come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.
⁸Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one.

Psalm 86:11–17

This psalm is a prayer to the gracious and loving Lord for mercy and guidance.

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth;
knit my heart to you that I may fear your name.
¹²I will thank you, O LORD my God, with all my heart,
and glorify your name forevermore.
¹³For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the nethermost pit.
¹⁴The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent men seeks my life;
they have not set you before their eyes.
¹⁵But you, O LORD, are gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.
¹⁶Turn to me and have mercy upon me;

give your strength to your servant; and save the child of your handmaid.

¹⁷Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed;
because you, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Second Lesson - Romans 8:12–25

For Paul, true spirituality means that we experience the reality of the Spirit, which enables us to pray as God's children, keeps us in solidarity with creation, and gives us unseen hope that God will liberate us and creation from bondage to death and decay.

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — ¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Holy Gospel - Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Jesus of Nazareth tells a parable about the co-existence of good and evil in this world.



²⁴Jesus put before the crowds another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Sermon

A couple of weeks ago, a member of the congregation dropped by the church office with a copy of the book *The Parables of Peanuts*. Written by author Robert Short as the sequel to his bestseller *The Gospel According to Peanuts*, both of these works explore the theological themes that *Peanuts* creator Charles Schulz wove into his renowned comic strip. Back in the early 1980s, Robert Short was a guest presenter at Lutheran Summer Assembly, an annual Virginia Synod event held for many years at

Massanetta Springs, outside of Harrisonburg. On a hot summer night, he spoke about *The Gospel According to Peanuts*, unpacking and interpreting the Christian imagery, the literary motifs, the symbolism, and principles so artfully revealed in the interactions of Charlie Brown, Lucy, Snoopy, and the rest of the gang.

Our gospel reading today – the parable of the wheat and the weeds – brings to mind a classic *Peanuts* comic strip in which Lucy confronts Charlie Brown, saying to him, “Charlie Brown, you are the crabgrass in the lawn of life.” Ouch! Crabgrass? Poor Charlie Brown. Those who try to maintain lawns or gardens may be all too familiar with the challenges of crabgrass – or nutsedge, or wire grass, or wisteria, or kudzu, or other invasive plants. Crabgrass and weeds are those problems that keep our lawns and gardens from being the way we think they ought to be and want them to be. As illustrated by Lucy in her figurative, “... you are the crabgrass in the lawn of life” take-down of Charlie Brown, crabgrass and “weeds” can also be those **PEOPLE** or **PROBLEMS** that keep life from being the way we think it ought to be.

This, of course, is nothing new. The author of the gospel according to Matthew is addressing that same issue within his community nearly 2,000 years ago. His use of the parable of the wheat and the wheat-look-alike-weeds points to some situation that is creating division in that first century of the Jesus movement. It is thought that the Matthean community was a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christ-followers, and perhaps neither group wanted to fully accept the other. Each side viewed itself as the “wheat,” and saw the “other” side as the “weeds,” as the “crabgrass in the lawn of life.” One can imagine the Jewish contingent resting on the laurels of their rich Abrahamic heritage, and the Gentile contingent reveling in their freedom from Jewish law. That’s why the gospel writer appeals to both sides to refrain from judging one another, calling them to live together – side-by-side – with forbearance and forgiveness. Differentiating “wheat” from “weeds” is a task far beyond their human ability – and ours. Wheat and weeds grow together, roots intertwined, and cannot be easily told apart. Just as it’s not the job of the servants in the parable to purge the field of weeds, it’s not the job of Jesus’ followers to point fingers and pronounce final judgment on other persons and groups, as tempting as that may be.

We can hear this parable on many levels: as a story about individuals or families, about faith communities or nations – all growing together and in relationship. There is good and evil, a mixture of competing impulses and desires, wheat and weeds, side-by-side, so entangled in the field of life that one cannot be uprooted without damaging the other. Once again, if we are honest with ourselves, we confess that wheat and weeds grow within each of us – we are **BOTH**, just as we are all four kinds of soil, as illustrated in last Sunday’s parable. We are simultaneously wheat and weeds, saints and sinners. It may be that when we think we are serving Christ most faithfully, it turns out that we’re really more interested in ourselves. On the flip side, we may do things we don’t even know are useful to God’s kingdom, and those actions end up making a difference. It’s hard to tell weeds from wheat.

St. Augustine, the late-fourth/early-fifth-century North African bishop, spoke of the Church as “a mixed body of believers.” Given our human self-centeredness, we always risk becoming so distracted by the “weeds” that we forget to live out the goodness for which God created and calls us right here and now. After all, it was “crabgrass in the lawn of life” thinking that nailed Jesus of Nazareth to a Roman cross. The focal point of the parable of the wheat and weeds is **GOD** – the God who shows forbearance and patience; the God who pours out forgiveness and mercy; the God whose concept of time is beyond our understanding; the God who keeps moving toward us, wheat and weed alike; the God who just won’t let us go or give up on us; the God whose mission is the saving work of love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It has been observed that the only thing we have much control over in life is where we focus our attention. Instead of being sidetracked or distracted by the “weeds,” what if we focused our attention and energy into being “wheat” – into caring for others, sowing good seed, seeking justice – even in fields where we may think weeds abound? Because God’s grace is at work in our lives through the living Word of God proclaimed and enacted sacramentally, we are therefore empowered to live our lives as steady, active, and resilient witnesses to God’s radical and enduring love – especially in a world in which weeds get misidentified, and the signs of God’s reign aren’t always clearly perceived. Our mission as ambassadors of Jesus the Christ **IN** the world and **TO** the world is to **LOVE** deeply even when love is hard to come by, to **DREAM** with God about what is possible even in the face of the impossible, to **OPEN**

wide our hearts – even in fields with some questionable plants, even in and through lives that know their share of crabgrass.

Like Charlie Brown, we, too, are like “crabgrass in the lawn of life” – and we don’t need the Lucys of the world to point that out because we already know it all too well. Thanks be to God that, by God’s grace, we are united with the life-giving, boundary breaking, expansive love of the Christ who turns “weeds” into “wheat.” Thanks be to God that we are in the tender care of a God who is rich in love, full of compassion, and formed in mercy. Amen

Hymn of the Day

We Plow the Fields and Scatter

1 We plow the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God’s almighty hand.
He sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

Refrain

All good gifts around us
are sent from heav’n above.
Then thank the Lord, oh, thank the Lord
for all his love.

2 He only is the maker
of all things near and far;
he paints the wayside flower,
he lights the evening star.
The winds and waves obey him;
by him the birds are fed.
Much more to us, his children,
he gives our daily bread. Refrain

3 We thank you, our creator,
for all things bright and good,
the seedtime and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food.
No gifts have we to offer
for all your love imparts,
but what you most would treasure--
our humble, thankful hearts. Refrain

Text: Matthias Claudius, 1740-1815; tr. Jane M. Campbell, 1817-1878, alt.

The Prayers

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the Church, the world, and all who are in need.

God of the harvest, you sow the good seed of the gospel of Jesus Christ into your field. Help your Church throughout the world to be both diligent and patient, full of resolve and gentleness, that our witness may be faithful to your intentions.

God of all space and time, your whole creation groans in labor pains, awaiting the gift of new birth. Help us renew the earth, sky, and sea, so that all your creation experiences freedom from the bondage of misuse and decay.

God of the nations, teach us your ways, that we may walk in your truth. Help us mend the fabric of the human family, now torn apart by our fearful and warring ways. Guide us by your mercy, grace, and steadfast love.

God of hope, you accompany those who suffer and are near to the brokenhearted. Open our hearts to your children who are lonely and abandoned, who feel trapped by despair, and to all who suffer in any way.

God of the seasons, in the midst of summer, give us refreshment, renewal, and new opportunities. We pray for the safety of those who travel. We pray for those who cannot take the rest they need.

God of life, those who have died in you shine like the sun in your endless kingdom. We remember with thanksgiving the saints of all times and places, as well as those saints close to us. Gather us with them into your eternal presence.

In the sure and certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

WE WORSHIP WITH OUR OFFERINGS

The needs of Holy Trinity's mission and ministry are ongoing during these times of upheaval and turmoil. Many of our outreach ministry partnerships are facing increased requests for services. May we be faithful and generous as we support our mission "to care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

Offerings may be mailed to the church or dropped off at the church office.

You may also use the online giving portal on our website.

Go to www.holytrinitylynchburg.org and click on "Give."

You may also download the "GivePlus Church" app for your smart phone from Apple or Google.

Offertory Prayer

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen*

Blessing

Almighty God, Father, ✙ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen

Dismissal

Our service now begins. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Prelude V: *Allegro*

Georg Joseph Vogler



*The altar flowers are given to the glory of God
by Moira Rafferty and Rob Bass
in honor of nurses and aides caring for the sick and elderly.*



*The candles are given to the glory of God
by Nancy Trent
in honor of Norma Glass, Vicki Harlow, and Nancy Childress.*

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Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Lynchburg, Virginia

Organist-Choirmaster - J. William Greene
Pastor - Dennis S. Roberts