

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Last week, in the face of opposition, Jesus began teaching in parables as prophesied, “*utter[ing] what [had] been hidden since the foundation of the world*” (Matt. 13:35). But remember, that didn’t make the spiritually blind to see or the spiritually deaf to hear. Rather, “*seeing they [did] not see, and hearing they [did] not hear, nor [did] they understand*” (Matt. 13:13).

In Jesus’ first parable, He used the figure of sowing seeds. He used that parable to help explain why some believed and others did not. Why? Because He used “means,” in particular “*the word of the kingdom*” (Matt. 13:19), and means can be resisted, as Jesus taught. The devil and the world, temptation and tribulation can keep the seed from taking root and growing and bearing abundant fruit.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells another parable that’s agrarian in nature. This time, we see a man, the Son of Man, going out, and He sowed good seed; but an enemy, the devil, came along, and, unbeknownst to the workers, he sowed weeds right on top of the good seed. The wheat and the weeds — sometimes the weeds are called tares as the hymn has it: “Wheat and tares together sown, Unto joy or sorrow grown” (LSB892:2) — both sprouted up and grew together. Apparently, there was little difference between the wheat and the weeds. The workers found out when the fruit appeared on the wheat.

Jesus later explains that the field represents the world. The wheat and weeds growing together is a sober reminder that believers and unbelievers, the righteous and the unrighteous, Christians and non-Christians live together side by side in the world. In our daily lives, we have lots of opportunities to interact with weeds.

Now, Jesus is not using this parable as a missionary text, calling on us believers to evangelize the unbeliever. Surely, elsewhere He calls upon preachers to preach the Word (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) and the church to baptize, making disciples (Matt. 28:18), but that’s not here. The point is not about miraculously changing weeds into wheat; it’s about the wheat enduring while surrounded by weeds.

Yes, Jesus’ point is to remind us that there is an enemy, and that enemy sows seeds also ... weed seeds ... lies and hate and distrust ... errors that also sprout and grow. They are “*the sons of the evil one*”; they may not be easy to spot at first, but these weeds also bear fruit. Jesus says elsewhere: “*You will recognize them by their fruits*” (Matt. 7:16). Lies beget more lies, hate more hate, distrust more distrust, error more error.

We might think — as the workers in the parable did — that the best thing is to pull those weeds up right away. But Jesus says, “No. Leave them alone until the harvest, for in pulling the weeds you may uproot some wheat. Leave them for my harvest angels, who will gather in the weeds first and burn them, and then gather in the wheat for the harvest barns.”

This makes Jesus’ toleration of the weeds understandable. He does it so that not even one stalk of wheat is uprooted with the weeds and lost. Such is the Lord’s stated desire ... not the death of sinners but repentance for us and faith and life (Ezek. 18:32). That is why Jesus came among us — to live the perfect life and to die the perfect death in our place — lifted up as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, offering Himself up for our ransom, and raised up from death to life. Jesus did this to forgive us and to give us everlasting life, a grace we receive by faith as we look to Him who is “*the way and the truth and the life*” (John 14:6).

Yet, we can be troubled by the error allowed to live and grow next to the truth. That made me think of a 19th century American Lutheran theologian, who famously wrote about the course of error in the Church ... but I’ve observed it’s much the same in the world. Charles Porterfield Krauth was this Lutheran theologian. He taught that error progressed through three stages: toleration ... just let us be; to equal rights or parity, I might call it, truth and error on equal footing; to supremacy, error no longer tolerating the truth (C. P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation & Its Theology*, chapter V: The Confessional Principle of the Conservative Reformation).

Yes, error “begins by asking *toleration*. Its friends say to the majority: You need not be afraid of us; we are few, and weak; only let us alone; we shall not disturb the faith of others. ... of course we shall never interfere with [your standards]; we only ask for ourselves to be spared interference with our private opinions.”

After some time, Krauth observes, “error goes on to assert *equal rights*,” and to decide “between them,” that would be unfair. It would be “bigotry to assert any superior right for the truth.” What we hold in common is what is important; anything else, by definition, is not, and if you disagree, you are simply a “disturber of the peace”; you’re not being kind; you’re not being like Jesus.

From there, Krauth continues, “error soon goes on to its natural end, which is to assert *supremacy*. Truth started with *tolerating*; it comes to be merely tolerated, and that only for a time.” Given a choice, error must surely be preferred over truth. People are placed into positions of power because they hold to error, and they seek

to silence all opinions contrary to it by threat of punishment ... the loss of friends and family, the loss of reputation, the loss of livelihood, the loss of freedom.

Today, it's called "being cancelled," and it has become prevalent. What Paul mentioned a couple weeks ago — the evil of transgenderism — is only the latest in a series of errors that plague our world. Speaking out against it can bring one into the crosshairs of activists who themselves tolerate no dissent from the new orthodoxy and will seek to destroy you.

Even so, Jesus doesn't want us bearers of truth to tear out the weeds. He doesn't want us to silence ourselves, but He does want us to be aware of the situation we're in, that we might prepare ourselves for the persecutions that are sure to come if you stand up against their error; there will be pressure to deny the faith, to deny the truth, to deny Christ. But, eternal life is at stake, and as Jesus will say in a few weeks hence, "*What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul*" (Matt. 16:26)? Therefore, we pray that the Spirit would help us in our fleshly fears and weaknesses.

Now, when the disciples ask Jesus to explain the parable, it's interesting that His focus changes from our **life now** among unbelievers to the **life to come** at "*the end of the age.*" Dr. Gibbs points out that Jesus' audience has changed from the crowd (Matt. 13:34) to the twelve (Matt. 13:36) which could be the reason for the change of focus (Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary: Matthew 11:2–20:34*, p. 697, 708). Jesus reminds the disciples — and us, too — that there will be a consummation. That can steel our resolve, help us endure. The harvest will come, and when that time comes, the unrighteous unbelievers will receive their just punishments, while the righteous believers will receive the glory of the kingdom of God. Indeed, enduring to the end has its benefits, as St. Paul encourages us: "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*"

Therefore, be encouraged by Jesus' words and by His Sacrament offered today. May God grant us eyes to see and ears to hear and minds to understand our life as Christians among unbelievers here on earth. May God grant us tongues to confess Jesus as Lord and tongues to proclaim the good news of Jesus. May God grant us hearts to believe steadfastly in Christ Jesus amidst the trials of this life until we attain to the goal of our faith: everlasting life.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.