

July 19, 2020
Seventh Sunday after
Pentecost



**Surely God is in the Place,
Wherever you are**

ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Ruth Garwood

Scripture texts:

Genesis 28:10-19a-- Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24-

Romans 8:12-25—Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We come to celebrate God's blessings to us.

Surely God is in this place!

We come to open ourselves to God's guidance and love.

Surely God is in this place!

We come to see more clearly God's presence in our lives.

Surely God is in this place!

We come to see God in this community of seekers.

Surely God is in this place!

We come to pray, praise, and offer ourselves to God.

Surely God is in this place! Let us worship!

INVOCATION: (Let us pray)

Holy One, you know us already.

Help us to know you better.

Let us see you all around us.

Fill our worship with your Spirit

so that we may learn to recognize your presence in all places. **Amen.**

PSALM 139:1-12, 23-24

(More proof that God is truly with us.)



“Lord, you have examined me. You know me.

You know when I sit down and when I stand up.
Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.
You study my traveling and resting.

You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.
There isn’t a word on my tongue, Lord,
that you don’t already know completely.
You surround me – front and back.

You put your hand on me.
That kind of knowledge is too much for me;
It’s so high above me that I can’t fathom it.

Where could I go to get away from your spirit?
Where could I go to escape your presence?
If I went up to heaven, you would be there.
If I went down to the grave, you would be there too!

If I could fly on the wings of dawn,
stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—
even there your hand would guide me;
even there your strong hand would hold me tight!

If I said, “The darkness will definitely hide me;
the light will become night around me,” even then
the darkness isn’t too dark for you!

Nighttime would shine bright as day,
because darkness is the same as light to you!
Examine me, God! Look at my heart!
Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!
Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me,
then lead me on the eternal path!”

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The servants of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Master, didn’t you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy has done this,’ he answered. The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us to go and gather them?’

²⁹ “But the landowner said, ‘No, because if you gather the weeds, you’ll pull up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvesttime I’ll say to the harvesters, “First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.”

³⁶ Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ Jesus replied, “The one who plants the good seed is the Human One. ³⁸The field is the world. And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom. But the weeds are the followers of the evil one. ³⁹The enemy who planted them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the present age. The harvesters are the angels. ⁴⁰Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire, so it will be at the end of the present age. ⁴¹The Human One will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin.

⁴² He will throw them into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Those who have ears should hear.”



SERMON: A Parable about Judgment

You might recall hearing me say that each sacred scripture text has three messages. For example, there is the message that Jesus gave while he walked the earth, there is the message that the author of each Gospel is trying to convey even

when they are writing down their Gospel 50 or more years after the Ascension of Jesus.

Each of the authors of our Gospels were involved with forming new churches and gatherings of new believers in Jesus Christ. Whenever you form new groups, problems are bound to happen. So, the scripture text could have a message about those particular problems. And then there is us, the readers of each Gospel. What is the message we are invited to hear and learn? Like the Energizer Bunny, the messages just keep going. This parable is definitely one of those messages.

First of all, this parable is written only in the Gospel of Matthew. None of the other Gospels have this particular parable. Secondly, it has some elements that do not seem natural or normal. It’s as though the author wrote the interpretation first and then made up a parable to fit the interpretation. It’s just not probable or believable.

If the landowner has servants, why is he sowing the seeds? It says he planted “good” seed. What farmer would plant “bad” seed. Then the servants say an enemy planted the weeds. Do you really have to plant weeds? Don’t they just pop up in any garden? The ancient people did not have chemicals to kill weeds. If you found weeds in your garden, wouldn’t you pull them out as soon as you

saw them instead of waiting for the harvest? If the weeds are left, they may choke out the good crop.



I'm not a gardener, but this story does not sound like something that happened in real life. The first hearers of this parable might have been thinking

this land owner is not very smart.

Granted writing parables is not easy. Try it and let me know how it goes. I think Matthew is trying too hard to make it fit the interpretation he has in mind. In general, the Gospel of Matthew has many themes of the final judgment. When this parable talks about good and bad seed, good farmers and enemies, Matthew is setting up a judgment message.

Having the servants wait until the harvest to separate the wheat from the weeds, is how Matthew is describing what will happen when Jesus returns. He will separate the good people from the evil ones.

But that's the message. Who should be deciding the good from the bad? **God, not us.** Let God decide when God comes to judge the harvest. Perhaps that is what was going on in Matthew's church. Matthew's church certainly contained undesirable elements (Matthew 7:21-23, and 18:15-20), and in that church, as in many others,

the desire to achieve purity and perfection was in tension with the obligation to accept, forgive, and restore.

The landowner (represented by Jesus) commanded against efforts to expunge evil had three reasons behind it. First, such attempts now are premature. Second, such attempts have as their usual result the disturbance and loss of the faithful in the process of seeking to eliminate the unfaithful. And third, the task of judging between good and evil belongs not to us but to Christ.

We are not to judge (7:11) but rather to work at reconciliation (18:15-16) and to forgive without limitation (18:21-22). Christ will separate the weeds from the wheat.

This scripture text has two messages for us today. Do not fret over evildoers, for neither their present nor their future is your responsibility; and second, God will bring history to a close with justice, and the saints finally will be freed from abuse and oppression. The parable of the weeds in the wheat is therefore not a threatening but a comforting word. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Today we pray for those affected by the pandemic; those who are ill, those who have died, and the families of those who are grieving. We pray for those on our prayer lists.



We pray for those who are wearing their masks to protect the rest of us. We pray for those in nursing homes who are isolated

for their protection, yet make their loneliness worse.

We pray for the families who have lost loved ones who have been killed by those who were afraid of them. We pray for those of us who have white skin that we change our fears of the “others” to love for all. We have a white problem as our brothers and sisters of color are denied the same rights and respects that we enjoy. What can we do to change that? God help us all.

And we pray for our church, may it be a place of rest, solitude, refuge, and safety to all. We pray all these things in the name of the one who came to save us all, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR OFFERING: What we have received comes from seed sown in us by Jesus Christ. Having received the blessings of the harvest begun in us, let us remember that we are returning to God the fruits of the blessings we have received.

BENEDICTION:

God’s spirit is always with you.

Wherever we go, God is there!

If you ascend to heaven,

God is there.

If you settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

God is there.

In all places, God holds you fast.

May you know deeply the presence of God:

Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.

Go with God. Amen.

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST:

Barbara Moran, Matt Brown,
Mary Kay Richter, Nelson Libell,
Dave Seneczyn, Eric White,
Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin,
Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie,



Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard.

CONDOLENCES to the family and many friends of Father Roger Karban

P.S. Jesus says don’t judge people who are not wearing masks. But Jesus didn’t say anything against avoiding those people. Just stay away from them.

