

“The Kingdom of God is Messy”

I learned something this past week at VBS, or maybe it was just a good reminder. Being the teacher of “the Little ones” – I was reminded that everything doesn’t go as I want it to go. If you know me, you know I like order – and, well, 4, 5 and 6 years old are not always orderly – or quiet.

It is a reminder that there is a bit of utopianism in me – that I want a perfect world, now, already, in this lifetime. Perfect children, a perfect class, a perfect church. Jesus is here today to tell me, and you, that life in the church is messy.

The “kingdom of God” is not a utopian world here on earth. Children are out of control – they disobey their parents and other authorities. Adults sleep with those who are not their husband or wife. People get divorced. Vulgar words come from the same mouth that eats and drinks the most holy Body and Blood of Jesus. There are scandals, and grudges, and revenge.

As pious Christians, we don’t like that one bit. We expect a perfect kingdom – a field of waving wheat, glistening in the sun. We expect to look up and down each row and find “good Christians” – not a weed in sight. But that’s not how it is in God’s kingdom – not on this side of heaven.

This is how it is. Jesus preaches the Gospel and it bears fruit. There are those who hear and believe – trusting all that God has spoken. But the devil is also at work – busy sowing weeds in the Lord’s field. He preaches his own sermons – full of lies and deceit – and it too bears fruit, “the sons of the evil one.”

From time to time we awake from our slumber, take a look around – and we see weeds in the church. Where did these come from? How did they get here? And notice what we do – we blame God!

Jesus, I thought you only sowed good seed? Where did all these evil ones come from? How in the world did YOU let them grow in your kingdom? And then, with great arrogance, we offer to fix the mess for Jesus. “We’ll take care of it Jesus – we’ll get rid of everyone that shouldn’t be here.”

Such arrogance, such “taking of the kingdom into our own hands” – comes from fear, and unbelief. We fear what other people might think of us – that we are some conservative, cult-like, congregation of people – unloving – no better than anyone else, sinners, hypocrites. We fear they might be right.

We look at the church and fail to hear and believe God’s Word – regardless of what our eyes behold, or we experience in our lives. We do not “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” We do not trust that He has really defeated the evil one – that He truly is the Savior of sinners.

Embarrassed, fearful of our reputation before the world – we get out the corn knives and head into the field – slashing, ripping, tearing, and burning. We want a Round-Up ready church. We want a nice, neat, sterile church. In other words – we want a church without SIN – a church without sinners.

“Put down the corn knives,” Jesus says. Don’t go ripping out the weeds from my field – for in so doing – “you’ll root up the wheat along with [the weeds].” Try to eradicate sinners from my church – and you’ll rip out the wheat along with them – you’ll destroy ... “the sons of MY kingdom.”

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time” – I’ll take care of it. Really, Jesus? That’s your solution? “Let it be” !!!! [BTW folks, when Jesus says – “let it be” – that’s the word for “forgiveness.”] His solution to the weeds and the wheat is – “forgive them.”

Some days, that is more than I can handle. I’m not about to “let it be” – and – I tear into the field, taking the weeds in hand and ripping – and in so doing, have rooted up some of His wheat.

Why is it so hard to “let it be” – to forgive sinners? Because we see the harm they’ve inflicted – but also because we fear that they will get away with something. We fear the weeds will take over the whole field – that everything will be destroyed.

Some people see the weeds growing and say – “if that’s the way it’s going to be, I’ll have no part of it” – and they leave the congregation, or synod. They set out to plant their own kingdom – their perfect church.

At the heart of all this is faith in Jesus – trusting Him, and His Word. “I’ll take care of it at the harvest,” He says. On the Last Day, when I come with all my angels, I will separate the unbelieving sinners from the believing sinners. The unbelievers will be thrown into the everlasting fires of hell – and the believers, “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

It is not given us to eradicate the weeds from His field – it is given us to believe His Word – to trust that He forgives the repentant sinner, but does not forgive the unrepentant sinner.

Yes, life in the kingdom of God is messy in this world. So often you can’t tell the righteous from the unrighteous – and did you notice – Jesus doesn’t tell you to distinguish between them – because all of them, all members of this congregation, are sinners.

Now, don’t misunderstand – this parable is not about condoning SIN – telling people that it is okay to continue to live in their sin. Jesus DOES tell us to judge – to call SIN “sin” – and to forgive all who repent of their sin.

Could someone lie? Sure. Could someone fool us with their repentance? Absolutely. But when they confess their SIN – Jesus says – “forgive them.” Don’t worry folks – they may fool you – but they will not fool Me.

If you’re looking for a kingdom of God on earth that has no SIN, and no sinners – then repent. For we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Not one of us deserves to belong to Christ’s Church, to be called children of God – but God is gracious, giving us what we do not deserve – saying to you, through His Son, Jesus Christ – “I forgive you.”

We live in a messy church, to be sure – but we live by faith in Jesus. We trust that He is at work in and through His Church, by His Word, to call sinners to repentance. We

trust that He has defeated the evil one, He has overcome your death, He has redeemed you by His blood, and brought you into His kingdom.

It is His kingdom, His field – and He is the Lord of the harvest. As His beloved children – “let it be” – eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ – hear and believe His Word – forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you – for Jesus IS the Savior of sinners, your Savior, unto life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.