

"One Kind of Sinner, One Kind of Savior"

Text: Matthew 13:24-30

May the undeserved love of God be multiplied to you, and may you know that special peace which comes only to those who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and hell. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

I'd be surprised if there was anyone here this morning that didn't consider himself or herself "a good person." If you're up for a challenge, try coming up with a bullet-proof, one-size-fits-all definition for "a good person." Interestingly enough, I've never in my life met anyone who did not think of themselves as basically good. I've met many who wouldn't measure up to someone else's definition – maybe even yours or mine – but they always managed to measure up to their own. The trick, of course, is just to come up with a definition of "good" that includes yourself.

Let me give you a few examples of the problem. Let's say that a good man is one that is unashamedly patriotic, pays his taxes, works hard, is a leader in his community, loves his family, is faithful to his wife, and loves dogs. Most would probably agree that that's a pretty solid definition of a good man. It's also an accurate description of Adolph Hitler. How about if we just inject God into the mix? A good man is devoutly religious and goes to church regularly and prays every day, in addition to being a loving father, husband, and community leader. I'm sure that's exactly how Osama bin Laden viewed himself. I visited at length with a death row inmate in a maximum security prison in Florida that was convinced he was a good person – despite the fact that he was imprisoned (and later executed) for robbery, rape, and murder. I have no doubt that the guy in the cell next to his would have come up with all sorts of reasons why he too was basically a good person. His name was Ted Bundy.

So then how do we define what makes someone good? It doesn't work to just include certain good attributes. Everyone has at least a few of those. Nor does it work to define someone according to the *worst* thing they've ever done. We've all done sinful, shameful things. It doesn't even work to say that *everyone* is good or *everyone* is bad. In a moment we're going to hear our text, which establishes the fact that there are good and bad people in the world. This, then, is our goal for this morning – to allow God's Word to define who God regards as good, and who he defines as bad. Or, to use the picture drawn by Jesus in his parable, which are wheat and which are weeds.

The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in Matthew's Gospel, the Thirteenth Chapter:

ESV Matthew 13:24-30 *He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, ²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"*

This is God's Word. In an age where words have come to mean less and less, it's an amazing comfort to recognize that these are the very words of *God*. As such they are therefore not only absolutely true, they are worthy of our time, our undivided attention, and our respect. Asking our God to work powerfully in our hearts through these, *his* words, we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

We need look no further than today's headlines to prove how difficult it is to come up with a universal definition for "good" and "bad" in our society. The same person is seen by some as a violent, foul-mouthed, lawless anarchist, and by others as a conscientious, dedicated, courageous warrior in the cause of social reform and justice. In fact, the very things that prove to the one side that a person is bad are also the very things that prove to the other side that they are good. So what's the solution? Who is right?

Clearly we need an objective, authoritative, outside source to make that determination. An individual human being, even groups of human beings, are neither qualified nor capable of making that determination – *without outside help and direction*. To this, Christians rightly declare that we possess and place our trust in that "source," which is the Word of God in our Bibles, which means that we are right and they are wrong. In the picture drawn by Jesus in our text, we are the wheat (the good people) and unbelievers are the weeds (the bad people). End of story and say "amen." Good sermon, pastor.

Obviously there is an element of truth there, but there's also more, and we could rightly be described as superficial (and worse) if we stop there.

In that infallible guide we know as our Bibles, God summed up the two great commandments as **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." ...and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

^{ESV}(Mark 12:30-31) I think we can all agree that every single one of us has failed that divine standard. No one has loved God and neighbor perfectly. Jesus expanded on this summary of his will in the Sermon on the Mount when he said: **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'** ⁴⁴ **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**^{ESV}(Matthew 5:43-44)

When we look at what "the bad people" out there are doing today, do we look at them with love or with hate – according to the very human **"love your neighbor and hate your enemy"** or with Jesus' divine instruction that we are to **"love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us"**? I can only answer for myself, and the honest answer is disturbing. Maybe you find yourself in the same boat. Does that make *us* bad people? It's certainly an attitude that is contrary to the Word and will of our God.

By the way, just to be clear, loving our enemies doesn't mean that we approve, condone, or support what they are doing. It doesn't mean that we're supposed to adopt their views and goals. It *does* mean that we are supposed to have loving concern for their souls. We can want them stopped, but we cross a line when we wish them bodily harm, even death. Take another look at our text. You can read these words pridefully, as in **"We're the wheat. We're better!"** or we can thank God for that underserved gift of saving faith and adoption as his children, and recognize that not even God himself advocates the immediate destruction of the unbelievers. We can pride ourselves on the fact that the Godless are only spared because of us, or we can recognize that **"God our Savior desires all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** His desire is not to destroy, but to transform the weeds into wheat.

Is such a thing even possible? Can a weed ever become wheat? You and I were. No one is born good. Every human being is born in sin, and is therefore a natural enemy of God. Humanly speaking such a change is impossible, but not for God. In fact this transformation from weed to wheat, from an enemy of God to a child of God, is the most spectacular miracle God ever performs.

What all of this should teach us is that there is really only one kind of sinner – the kind that has failed to live up to God's perfect standard. How senseless to claim to be a "better sinner" because I haven't committed some of the sins for which I condemn others. Worse than senseless, it obscures and perverts our appreciation for God's grace, his *undeserved* love. God doesn't love us because our conduct is better. He doesn't see us as wheat, rather than weeds, because we have earned his love by our innate goodness or by our actions. To earn God's love through our actions would require perfection, and in that regard, all sinners are equal. We have all failed, miserably. That's why grace is grace. That's why God in his Word defines grace as his *underserved* love for sinners. There is not a single person with a human father that has earned God's love. Sin, even one sin, means failure, and if heaven must be earned through our works, there is only pass and fail, never "good enough." That's how and why there is only one kind of sinner. By definition, a sinner is one who has failed God's perfect standard. A sinner is one who cannot save himself. He is powerless to do so. His only hope is to *be* rescued.

It is undeniably true, based on Jesus' parable from our text in Matthew 13, that Christians are the wheat. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are the weeds. The gift God wants to give us through this message however is comfort, not complacency or arrogance. The real question is, **"What's the difference?"** What makes someone wheat, as opposed to weed?

To make the question more personal, why does God care so much about you? Why does he love *you* and regard you as precious in his sight – as wheat rather than weed? The answer is not found in you or in me, it's found in Jesus Christ. That's why just as there is really only one kind of sinner, so there is also only one kind of Savior.

The fact is God does not care for you *because* he knows you intimately; he cares for you *despite* the fact that he does know everything about you. He knows that you are just another failed sinner. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no difference between us and any other sinner in the world.

The only difference between the wheat and the weeds in our text is not, therefore, that the wheat are somehow better. The difference is that the wheat are those who believe that Jesus Christ has done what they never could – he paid their incalculable sin debt on the cross of Calvary. From 2 Corinthians 5:21: **"For (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the**

righteousness of God in Him." From Isaiah 53:6: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Mankind did not need a Savior that would come to earth to show us how to be better. We needed someone to come and actually do for us what we were powerless to do for ourselves. A savior that demands something from us – anything at all from us – is not a savior but a glorified life-coach. How barbaric for God to allow his Son to be tortured unnecessarily – to do for us what we could do for ourselves. That is, nonetheless, the common view of Jesus Christ. But understand that holding such a view of Jesus doesn't make someone wheat rather than weed. Such a view just makes you an arrogant, delusional, self-righteous, ungrateful weed, destined to be gathered and burned on God's Day of Judgment.

Again, the one kind of Savior that we all needed was the one that came to do what we could not. Jesus did that by living a sinless life, and then offering that perfect sacrifice on the cross as his payment for the world's debt of sin. The difference, therefore, between wheat and weed is not innate goodness, worth, or conduct. It is faith in Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, those who simply believe that he came to earth to do exactly what he said he would do, are wheat – God's beloved children. Those who do not trust that the goodness of Jesus Christ alone provided payment for their sin debt and reconciled them to God are weeds. ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** ^{ESV} (Mark 16:16)

All of this should teach us how sinful and unloving is any arrogant attitude toward those who have not yet been brought to saving faith. It's as if, having all jumped off of a ship and finding ourselves drowning but then pulled into a lifeboat by an unseen hand, we then disdainfully regard those still in the water not as objects of pity in need of rescue but as those whose heads should be held under until they quit bothering us. That's you and me in the water before we were rescued through the creation of saving faith in our Savior.

Remember instead that each of us once was lost, condemned, and without hope, thank God for his undeserved rescue, and then at least love enough to throw a rope to those who are in the same situation in which we once found ourselves. Their rescue, their transformation, is possible, but only through the transformative power of the Word of God. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 44:6-8** Thus 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. ⁷ Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. ⁸ Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

^{ESV} **Romans 8:18-27** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. ²⁶ ¶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 19, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 278 (Red Hymnal)

"Delay Not, Delay Not, O Sinner Draw Near"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 44:6-8) Here in the 44th Chapter of his Book, the Holy Spirit through the Prophet Isaiah gives a strong declaration that he alone is God. Not only is there no other God *like* ours, there simply *is no other God*. What idol could ever have the power simply to "proclaim," as does our God, and it is so. The word of the one true God alone (and always) rings true. This is the very God who not only both *knows us* and *cares for us*, he knows in advance. This is the God, the one true God, who is on our side. Who indeed is like the Lord?

Psalm 121 (Supplement page 42) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 8:18-27) It is astounding to realize that we not only know and believe in the one true God, that God knows and cares for us – individually and personally. In this reading we are also told that that same Creator-God, the Holy Spirit, both lives within us and intercedes for us. That is, he communicates our needs to God the Father on our behalf – with a perfect communication we could never hope to achieve.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 421 (Red Hymnal)

"Come Follow Me, the Savior Spake"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 13:24-30 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"One Kind of Sinner, and One Kind of Savior"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 364 (Red Hymnal)

"How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 54 (Red Hymnal)

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (20) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Rich Kanzenbach has accepted the call to St Luke's of Lemmon. Prof. Steven Sippert is considering the call to Bethel of Morris. Pastor Hein reports that he has recovered from his recent bout with COVID-19, and that the parsonage (recently damaged by an arson-caused fire) is in the process of repair and mediation.

Church Council Notes – All Council members, plus the Pastor, were present for the July 12 meeting. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings for June were \$1,828 below budgeted needs, but remain positive YTD. A new church projects list will be drafted for needed maintenance on the Church grounds. Summer VBS was cancelled for 2020. Home VBS options are being investigated. Pastor Roehl has been appointed to the ILC Planning Committee. The church website is in need of an upgrade – options to be investigated. Work continues on the sermon podcast project. The next Council meeting is scheduled for 8/16.

Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest – Unless otherwise requested, all current subscriptions for both the Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest have been renewed. Payment can be included with the regular offering.

Man Up Retreat – The annual men's retreat (18 and older) is scheduled for September 24-27, 2020, at Wyalusing State Park near Prairie du Chien, WI. The cost is \$75, including lodging and meals. You can register at www.tinyurl.com/manup-2020 or find more information at www.manup.clclutheran.org.