SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, July 19, 2026 **Festal Eucharist**
The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost 11:00 am

+

A Sermon by
The Rev. Mark Schultz
on
Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

+

The Parable of the Tares

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It will, at this point, for most of you, come as no surprise at all that in grade school a friend of mine and I formed a secret society. This would not be the last secret society I would form as a child, but it was the first, so it holds a special place in my heart:

The Empire of Organized People.

There were very few people in it, so it was relatively easy to organize, But did we ever have a passion for organizing ourselves.

In fact, the Empire of Organized People was more or less what would happen If a protestant fourth grader's fever dream of the Roman Catholic hierarchy was mashed up with said protestant fourth grader's tenuous comprehension of York Rite Freemasonry and a deficient understanding of the European peerage.

Consequently, we were mostly interested in conferring on each other.

Various important-sounding or mystic titles from day to day or week to week. I think one week I was, quite fantastically, Archduke and Prince Archbishop of the Temple of the Wisdom of Solomon.

Or some such.

Which was very. Extra. For that week.

Of course what that was, right, was a child's attempt to articulate what it might mean to belong in and to the world in a way that felt Powerful, meaningful, marvelous, good. Certainly more powerful, meaningful, marvelous, good than being just another fourth grader in the palm-tree spotted concrete suburban monotony of southern California.

Because what haunts every Archduke and Prince Archbishop of the Temple of the Wisdom of Solomon, what haunts, I think, so many of us in one way or another, to one degree or another, is the nagging suspicion that whatever power, meaning, marvel, goodness are…they're…elsewhere. Not where we are.

Not actually who or what we are. So we compensate by becoming false versions of ourselves that can appropriate to ourselves the power, meaning, marvel, and good we desire from the world, from each other.

After all:

I'm the Archduke and Prince Archbishop of the Temple of the Wisdom of Solomon.

I'm someone, something…good.

And who or what might *you* be?

Part of the difficulty, of course, is that our understandings of power, meaning, marvel, good—Insofar as we receive them from this fallen world, insofar as we internalize them from the social, political, cultural, familial or personal structures and patterns of oppression, sin and death that produce and reproduce oppression, sin and death in every aspect of our social, political, cultural, familial and personal lives—Our understandings of power, meaning, marvel, good are fantastically absurd to begin with, predicated on wealth or status or fame or prestige or some other subtler violence: belonging to the right group or groups, the right and good us-es over against the wrong and bad thems.

And this is why the parable of the Wheat and Tares Jesus tells in our reading this morning Is salutary, because it's pointing us toward a marvelous understanding of who we are, who we actually, really are. That is true. That is life-giving. That is good. And that is, fundamentally, gift.

Now, one of the challenges, with our parable this morning, is that it comes in two parts and in the second, our Lord appears to provide an explanation of the first.

So we think we know what it's all about and, after all…it's pretty clear, right? A householder sows wheat in their field, an enemy sows weeds, and the farmhands ask the householder.

Shouldn't we gather up the weeds, no one wants a weedy field. And the householder, contrary, perhaps, to expectation, says, no no no no no. If you do that, you might gather up some of the wheat instead.

Wait until everything is full grown and then you'll be able to see to separate out what's wheat and what's weeds. This is actually wise advice, given that the weeds were likely darnel-weeds, a kind of weed that, as it's developing, looks remarkably like wheat—so much so, it's also called "false wheat" The point of the story becomes, in part: we don't know what's good and what's not.

We can't actually tell the difference.

And all our efforts at cultural or religious or social or political purity Will always prove monstrous and end up destroying the good.

This is true. Every Utopia is built on the rejection, persecution and destruction of the "unworthy." And *we're neve*r the problem, it's always *them*. It's not our group, it's theirs.

But there's more here: while this parable has classically been known as the Wheat and the Tares It should really be known as The Patient Householder.

Because the patience of God is the keynote, is the whole point.

The condescending mercy of God is the keynote, is the whole point.

And this mercy is not idle but active: it cares for all of us, every human being.

It is the sun and the rain to the field, it is the life of our life and love of our love in us. This parable is about God's desire not to smite the wicked weed, but to root, through patient grace, the wildly fickle human heart in the unchangeable goodness of God, So that we will bear fruit, good fruit, worthy of repentance.

Because until we, ourselves, each of us bear fruits worthy of repentance, until we respond, personally respond, with gratitude and humility to the Householder's mercy, until we receive the grace we need from the gentle care of the Householder, the gentle love of God, who desires not to pluck us up, but gently to unpick with his own patient, love-wounded hands the comfortable and familiar patterns of sin and oppression and death that run us and live in us and bind our hearts: until by grace we begin to live as the Children of the Kingdom that God has desired us to be, that God has made us to be, that all of creation is groaning for us to be…

Until then…no one will be able to tell if we ourselves are wheat or weed; if we are who God has known us to be, or if we are the false wheat, the false selves that sin and death have made of us. The patience of the Householder is key—the undeserved mercy of God which, when received, liberates us from sin and death and makes us truly ourselves by making us, revealing us, as children of the Kingdom of Love.

Interestingly, though, the disciples don't quite get it yet. When they ask Jesus in private to explain to them the parable They don't call it The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, nor the Parable of the Patient Householder They call it the Parable of the Tares.

It's as if they're saying, "Lord, we heard the stuff about patience and mercy, but explain to us the terrible things that will happen to the weeds, to the bad people who are definitely not us."

Our Lord responds with less of an explanation and more of a retelling of the parable in an apocalyptic register.

It's not clear that the disciples understand this version of the parable more than the other, and the fact that our Lord will continue his apparent explanation with a series of additional parables That we'll hear next week suggests that, indeed, the disciples were still a bit at sea, and Jesus was probably interested in keeping them there a little longer In the hopes that the parables, acting collectively as a spiritual ferment, would work in them and through them to produce a realization of spiritual truths that was less discursive and subject to an alienated didactic explanation and more experiential, relational, a eureka moment.

Be that as it may…this version of this morning's parable is all about the end of the age The Householder is revealed to be the Son of Man, the field is the world, the wheat the Children of the Kingdom, the weeds, the false wheat, the children of the wicked one and their sower is the devil, the Father of Lies.

And it's here that we must be careful…because Jesus seems to be mirroring the desire of the disciples To have a clear demarcation between the good people and the bad people, between the children of God and the children of the devil that appears fatalistic and cosmically pre-destined and would only serve to ratify or fund Any particular project of discrimination between good-folks-like-us and bad-folks-like-them That the disciples or we might have.

But we must not divorce this version of the story from the parable of the Patient Householder The mercy of God must remain the keynote.

Any mirroring that Jesus is doing here of the disciples' prejudices, of our own prejudices is for the purposes of naming them in order to undermine them completely, to bring us out of them. And it's at this point in the story that Jesus makes this shift:

"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire." All things that offend—other translations have "all causes of sin"

Our passions, our inordinate desires, our hatreds, our enmities, our wrath, our violence Our death-infected ways, our wayward hearts, our lies…and…our false selves.

All these will be cast into the furnace. Whatever has drawn us away from what is true from who we are in Christ Jesus, from how God has known us from before the foundations of the world All of it: cast into the furnace.

And…let's be clear: that means *we* will be cast into the furnace, too.

We who have nurtured the false in ourselves, the seed of death and division in ourselves We must undergo the fire:

Which is some of the best news you will hear today.

While narratively this furnace of fire comes out of nowhere, contextually, the furnace is often a feature of descriptions of the end times.

Micah in particular speaks of the coming of Messias as a furnace or oven, Messias himself, he says, is like a refiner's fire.

Beloved, the furnace of fire at the end of the age is none other than the fierce fire of God's unveiled being of love:

Indeed, it is the furnace of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, blazing with the Eternal Fire of God's Love It will burn away our passions, our sin, and death

the false wheat, the false selves we wrongly call ourselves, mere masks of wrath or avarice or envy or any other comfortable sin All that will burn and it will refine us, and burnish us and make us shine forth like the sun. If you want to shine that brightly, you must become a living fire.

This apocalyptic register of the parable is meant to do what apocalypses are generally meant to do: To reveal, to unveil: that's what the word apocalypse means.

Our Lord reveals to the Apostles, to us: the patient mercy of God is an all-consuming fire of love by which, when we are given to it, we are revealed as God's children, we are glorified by becoming the living flames of love that God has always desired us to be and known us to be in Christ.

Being the Archduke and Prince Archbishop of the Temple of the Wisdom of Solomon, with all of its false and absurd grandiosity, being some false self, bound to and by darkly smoldering passions Bound to and by division, animosity, enmity, cannot compare to the free gift of who we are in Jesus Christ; cannot compare to who we are in the light and fire of God's glistering and glorious love In which all sense of flimsy earthly sin-sick power, meaning, marvel, or good is burned up in the resurrection light of Jesus

Christ… And we become who we truly are filled with the power, meaning, marvel and goodness of God Rooted in the Heart of Jesus, One with the fire of God's love Not in spite of the flame, but because of it.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.
