

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

I don't know about you, but it seems like life just keeps getting more and more complicated. I think of my grandmother, born in the mid-1890's, who lived a 74-year span of life. During that comparatively brief amount of time in human history, she literally lived from horse and carriage as primary transportation, to seeing a man walk on the moon, with automobiles and airplanes invented and developed for common use in between. Women finally got the vote, 2 world wars, the Korea, and Vietnam conflicts, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In her generation, too bad if you didn't like change! You had to *learn* to like it, or at the very least, adapt to it very quickly. Perhaps that era is when rapid change became the norm in our country.

Then in the 50's and 60's came the development and popularity of "labor-saving devices" – from automatic washing machines and driers, to the availability of air-conditioning in private homes, to the marvel of huge, room-sized computers.

And on it went from there. Each decade had *its* major innovations – from the information explosion (thanks to personal computers and the development of the world-wide-web), to pocket-sized phones and computers; from microwave ovens, to the proliferation of deadly nuclear weapons; from women clergy, to gay clergy, to miraculous advances in the medical world.

The goal of all of these changes – which, for a while at least, was called "progress" – was to provide more leisure time for everyone, from homemakers to CEO's. But that just hasn't seemed to happen. From what I have experienced as I've lived through and with all of these changes – as you have – is that we have less leisure than ever before.

Even our kids. Few ever lay out in the grass and watch the clouds go by; or go on a Penny Hike (remember those? When you come to a corner you toss a coin and, depending on how it lands, you turn either right or left and, after some time, see where you end up), jumping rope, or (gasp!) *reading a book*, just for the fun of it!

Now, we live with *so many* choices, *so many* opportunities, *so many* decisions, and

so *much* human and cultural influence, that we have to use more and more judgment as we make these choices and decisions. Sometimes we make good ones, sometimes bad ones; sometimes right ones, sometimes wrong ones. Unlike computers, we have no delete button to push when things don't go well. The way life works, we live with results of decisions, our choices, as well as with those decisions and choices of others in our lives -- *all* of them, good ones and bad ones. Yes?

Which is where this morning's parable comes in. The parable about the wheat and the weeds isn't fundamentally about a stark contrast between good and evil. The sower sows presumably good seed, but the weeds grow among the wheat anyway. Trying to rip just the weeds out risks tearing up the wheat as well, so the sower realizes he has to let them be – it is too hard to root out the weeds completely, just as it is for us to thoroughly root out evil in our lives. And so the sower must wait, living with both the wheat and the weeds until the day of harvest when they may be separated, in due time.

How often do we face similar dilemmas? If not with wheat and weeds then with any number of other difficult choices, like:

- Taking a new job that pays more – which would be very helpful -- but will keep you away from home and family significantly more; or, sticking with your current lower-paying job in order to have more time for home and family.
- Choosing between two different treatment options in responding to a grave illness, each one with advantages, each one with risks.
- This one is for all ages, not just children and teens: Giving in to peer pressure because it just too uncomfortable to be at odds with your friends; or, choosing to stick to your values and risk being teased at the least, ostracized at worst.
- How to use your money. Oh the difficult choices we face there every day!

You can make your own list.

In this parable Jesus promise is that in ambiguous, challenging situations, in the end, God will sort things out.

This isn't a rose-colored glasses promise – “Oh, do whatever. God will take care of it and everything will work out just fine!” Sometimes decisions and choices overwhelm

us. Sometimes we *don't* choose well. Sometimes things *do* go wrong. The promise here isn't that Christian faith prevents hardship, or that God will manipulate us so we're always "good" or always "right," always righteous in the midst of others around us who are always sinful. The reality is that we are – each and all of us – both wheat and weed, both saint and sinner. And the promise is that we are not justified by our right choices, but by God's grace through our faith. Knowing we have God's unconditional love in spite of our poor choices frees us to do the best we can, always seeking God's guidance, and without fear of instant condemnation.

In John's gospel, chapter 15, Jesus said:

You did not choose me but *I chose you*. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

Our synodical bishop, Pr. Tom Aitkin, recently wrote:

The thing is, you see, that we don't live in an ideal world. Each week we're faced with a myriad of challenging decisions, some small and others large, to which there is no clear answer. Some decisions we'll get right, others wrong, and still others we won't know whether we were right or wrong for months or years to come. But we still need to make them. And then, each week, no matter how we fared, we can come back to church on Sunday morning to be reminded that God [desperately] loves us and promises that, in the end, God will hold all of our choices and all of our lives together in love.

When we come to church on Sunday morning, we are able to join with others and acknowledge that life is hard, sometimes *really* hard, and the choices in front of us are not always clear or easy. But not only do we have the support of the community in making these difficult choices – support both in love and in prayer -- no matter how our choices and decisions turn out, we can return on Sunday morning and hear again words of forgiveness, grace, and encouragement as we are sent once again into the world to make

difficult choices and compromises on behalf of ourselves and of others, as we try to be the people God created us to be.

I'd like us to do something rare in Lutheran worship. I'd like us to take some time in silence to think about some of the difficult choices you've made recently, or will have to make soon. I'd like us to be still, and pray for the decisions we and those around us are facing. Begin by taking a few deep breaths to quiet yourself. When the time feels right, we will close in prayer.

(Several moments of silence)

*Dear Lord, our life is sometimes hard, and we don't always know the right or best thing to do. But we do know that your love is guiding us and that you have called us to live as your people in the world. When we face hard choices, give us eyes to see the best path forward, and then, give us the courage to follow it. When we make mistakes, forgive us. When we are hurt by our choices, comfort us. When we hurt others, help us to reach out to them in love. And above and beyond all these decisions, remind us that you always love us and call us back to this place of worship, that we may be assured of your forgiveness, renewed, and sent forth once more as your beloved children. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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