

Senior Pastor's Remarks for July 2020:

This week's lectionary once again provides me with a helpful framework as I set out to comment upon another month of ministry here with Grace. While the entire Gospel text for this Sunday ([Matt 13:24-43](#)) is helpful, I want to focus on the first section: the parable of wheat and weeds. In this parable, the slaves ask the master whether they should gather the weeds, so the wheat can grow. The master replies, No, for in gathering the weeds, the wheat would be uprooted too. And so, if we are not careful, we may slip into thinking all this little parable teaches is how we ought to allow the unsavory alongside the ideal, because to try to remove the former will, at least to some extent, remove the latter, too.

The parable of wheat and weeds refers to eschatological judgment, that is, the final outcome - who's in and who's out. The wheat goes into the barn, whereas the weeds go into the fire. In order to use this parable properly, we have to notice how the focus on end-of-time judgment limits its application. This distinction is important, because if we assume the parable applies to *everything* in life, we'll be forever waiting for God and harvest time...and very little will be accomplished for the sake of the Kingdom.

Good news: the parable, though limited, may give us some clue as to what we do in the meantime. Perhaps to see this, one needs to have grown something. Growth is not, purely speaking, a waiting game (even if it feels that way sometimes). Growth requires *cultivation*. No water? No growth. No sunlight? No growth. Are the neighbor kids playing football on top of the field? Good luck with that harvest. The parable directly addresses that God's people leave the final judgment to God, yes; but that does not let us off the hook in the meantime. And 'the meantime' sounds a lot like where we are right now.

In the meantime, between now and eternity, our efforts work to proclaim and prosper God's Kingdom, in all its present reality. In the meantime, between now and eternity, we have opportunities to cultivate for God's Kingdom in *local* concerns - everything from local policies that provide justice to policies in our congregation that allow us to continue growing in healthy ways. We are mostly unable to be together physically, but let's not pretend that means we are without ways of connecting, learning, and worshipping together. If we can commit to doing these things now, in the meantime, imagine how much more effective they will be when we can do them in the same physical space!

I look back at the past month and, on paper, it doesn't look like much - not compared to other months anyway. In fact, I looked my report and thought to myself, *Did* I sow good seed? Our Gospel text reminds me that we cannot act as though every day is the harvest. This is a blessing in two ways. First, I am reminded that faithful work rarely produces immediate results - that sort of thinking is really just a form of perfectionism and it is not helpful. And second, I am reminded that the harvest time *is* on its way. This means each day is the gift of an opportunity to work towards growth, trusting that God will supply everything necessary in due season.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks for July 2020:

During this past month, we transitioned to having both in-person and online worship, moving into Stage 2 of our COVID response plan. This transition has gone pretty smoothly, thanks to the thorough work that was done in advance by Council, the Health and Wellness committee, and the Task Force, as well as Pr. Gregg's thoughtful and fun messaging through letters and videos, and the dedication of Jeremy and Craig. The case numbers went up dramatically in SC and in York County right before we began in-person worship, and so, reasonably, our attendance has been low. I am grateful that people are making the choice that is safest for them. I am also delighted that the quality of our online worship has not declined; Craig, Jeremy, and Pr. Gregg have put in much extra effort to ensure we continue to have a seamless streaming experience with music and spoken liturgy.

This month has included a significant amount of pastoral care and parishioner connection. I have been blessed to get to know a number of members better through phone calls, Zoom, and porch visits, being invited to walk with them in joyful celebrations and in difficult times. I was especially glad to be able to facilitate the Graduation Milestone for our youth, marking this important point in their lives and sharing it with the congregation.

While it's difficult for any of us to plan very far in advance right now, I *am* looking forward to resuming our Hospitality goals for 2020 in the coming months. I am confident that we can find reasonably safe ways to accomplish these goals, which will mean that our building will be even more welcoming when we're able to gather together in all parts of it again. Moving forward with these plans is possible, of course, because the members of Grace have continued their faithful generosity through this pandemic, and we have the financial resources available to cover the exciting updates and improvements we have in store. I am so thankful for everyone's ongoing generosity and commitment to our mission at Grace!

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel