

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost–July 19, 2020

“Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest . . .’” (Matthew 13:28–30)

Our churches are far from pure because they are full of sinners like us. But there are differences among sinners. Some sinners are believers while others are not. Thus, the state of the church as we experience it is mixed.

For a church that is focused upon discipleship and evangelism, this is a good thing. We truly hope that unbelievers will attend our churches so that God may touch them through his Word. There is no problem with overt unbelievers attending our churches. The problems come when covert unbelievers sow strife and dissention among us.

Jesus says that our situation is like a wheat field into which an enemy has sown some weeds. As the plants grow up, the wheat and the weeds exist side-by-side in the same field. This leaves the farmer with two bad options. Either he can leave the weeds in place and allow them to hamper the growth of the wheat. Or he can pluck the weeds out and uproot the wheat along with them. Of these two options, leaving the weeds in place is the lesser evil.

We generally follow this prudent course in our churches. We don’t excommunicate people for little things. After all, within the church the lives of believers and unbelievers are intertwined, just like the wheat and the weeds in the field. Accordingly, when we remove a bad actor, we may well uproot many other people at the same time. Thus, excommunication is an option that we use only in extreme cases where toleration places the church in greater danger than removal. But this does not mean that we should ignore bad behavior. We may lovingly confront, reprove, and correct others (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus gives us a process for doing precisely this (Matthew 18:15–18). When we do this lovingly, we not only seek to change bad behavior, but we also seek to promote the conversion and/or spiritual growth of the perpetrator. After all, we are all weeds by nature, but God is in the business of turning pernicious weeds into bountiful wheat!

Prayer: Lord, give us the courage and the wisdom to handle conflict in a way that unifies and strengthens your church. Amen.

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