

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How would you describe the kingdom of God? A place with no sadness? A place where everyone gets along with each other – like the Bible says, the lion lives with the lamb? A mansion with many rooms – as Jesus describes to his disciples to comfort them? A city of gold and fine gems like we find described in the book of Revelation? All of these are valid ways to describe God’s kingdom, but compare them to how Jesus described them in the Bible verses we read a few moments ago. Do you remember? He tells us that the kingdom of God is like a wheat field full of weeds - weeds that were intentionally put there by an enemy. That’s kind of a strange way to describe the kingdom of God, isn’t it?

Usually when we think of the kingdom of God, we think about the final perfected result - heaven, the place where believers go for a perfect eternity after they die, but from Jesus’ parable, we learn that we can accurately say that God’s kingdom exists right here and now. Those who trust in Jesus here on earth right now are God’s kingdom, forgiven children of God which, in spite of our sins, God sees as perfect. Jesus says that in its present state, this kingdom is like a wheat field growing ready for the harvest. Like every field, it has wheat, but it also has weeds. With a garden in my own back yard, I know a little more about weeds than I would like to know. They are pervasive. If you look at my bean plants or strawberries, you will also see plenty of weeds. Still, if I were showing you the garden, I would say, “there are my strawberry plants.” “There are my beans.” You can imagine that in Jesus’ day the weeds may have been even worse. No herbicides, no rototillers. The weeds might even outnumber the stalks of wheat in a field. Still, a farmer could point to those wheat plants surrounded by weeds and truthfully say, “There is my wheat!”

As God looks down at the earth he certainly doesn’t see a place like heaven. It isn’t a place exclusive to believers with no sadness or pain or hardship. It is often a harsh place, where his children encounter enemies. Many times, his children are outnumbered by those who oppose or reject the God of the Bible. Sometimes the weeds outnumber the wheat! Still, God can look down and truthfully say as he looks at the billions whom he has called to faith and who have put their trust in Jesus to forgive their sins and take them to heaven and say. “There is my kingdom!”

Now I doubt that there is anyone here who didn’t know that believers live in the midst those who reject the Christian faith here on earth. That wasn’t news to Jesus’ disciples either. So what point is Jesus making? What is he teaching us by using the picture of wheat among the weeds? Jesus’ first point is that we would recognize the coming of God’s kingdom here and now, and be thankful for it. The Christians that we know aren’t just people that we hope will be part of God’s kingdom one day, they are his kingdom right here and now. They are a blessing to us and a constant reminder that God’s promise to preserve his kingdom – the Christian church on earth is begin kept each and every day. It’s so easy to forget. I think we go down that road more than we might like to admit. We see the weeds – the threats to God’s people, and we see God’s kingdom and we bury our heads, and long for the day when God’s kingdom comes and the weeds are gone. We ignore the wheat and worry too much about the weeds. And instead of drawing strength looking for the wheat – drawing strength and encouragement from our fellow Christians, what do we do? Maybe we try to camouflage ourselves among the weeds.

Every day we experience or observe a growing lack of basic respect for people. It used to be that if a student got in trouble at school, the teachers were assumed to be right unless there was substantial proof of the opposite, now the child is assumed to be right, and the teacher, the liar. There was a time when talking back to a police officer was unthinkable, now it is common place. There was a time when an apology was what was expected after an honest mistake, now you are expected to sue. And how about property? Look at the graffiti and vandalism that runs rampant. Talk to any school principal, janitor, or landlord, and they will quickly tell you that respect for the property of others have not increased over the last few years. And when everyone is doing it, it’s so easy to follow along, excusing it by thinking, “Well it’s what I’ve got to do to survive until God’s kingdom actually comes.”

Or consider the world of modern entertainment. Crude and sexual humor is the norm, whether it’s *Modern Family*, or *Game of Thrones*, or Super bowl commercials, it seems like the only thing that people think is funny or entertaining is jokes or innuendo about sex. And if you think I’m overstating the case, the next time you watch a movie, or sitcom, make a tally of the sex jokes vs. the other humor. And it desensitizes us, to the extend we can almost try and defend it thinking, “That’s just the way it is, until God’s kingdom comes. What’s the harm in a little bawdy humor? I can’t just ignore everything around me.”

How about respect for God himself? God has become more expletive than the name of the all powerful being who made me and holds my soul in his hand. Editorials openly mock faith in the Bible. Christ is presented as a farce, a myth, or worse. Are we ourselves holding back what we believe, to avoid ridicule, to maintain an upward trajectory on the job, to keep a boyfriend or girlfriend? It’s very easy to excuse it all thinking, “Well, that’s just the way it is. I don’t like it, but I have to do it until God’s kingdom comes.” It’s easy to become so worried about the weeds that we ignore or forget the wheat – the Christians who comprise God’s kingdom here.

That’s when God reminds us to stop, look at the whole field. There is still wheat, it isn’t just weeds. Each day thousands are baptized. Each day thousands are converted. Each day God’s kingdom grows. Each day there are believers who are growing in their faith and Christian living - changing how they speak, how they treat others, growing in what they consider good entertainment, growing in the boldness with which they witness to others. Yes, the weeds grow too, but to walk through life thinking “God is losing, better retreat, and hide until he comes back,” is not only a misunderstanding of his power, it is sinful.

God didn’t call us to crawl into our little shell, board up the door and say, “Help everyone out there is so terrible, the weeds will get us too.” God called us to be bold witnesses, to keep our heads up high. He has given us the tools win victories for his vibrant kingdom here and now. The simple message of what Jesus has done is chief among those tools. Are we maybe so convinced that this tool is worthless or inadequate that we are embarrassed to take it out of its holster? If that is the case, we never will get the chance to

see how God's kingdom can advance here and now when someone hears the message for the first time. But when we use it, when we see its power, it doesn't just change the person who hears it, it changes us by strengthening our trust that the message is really true.

We don't have to run scared from the weeds. We can make a positive impact by being respectful to people and property. You can find enjoyable activities and genuinely funny humor that isn't crude, it just takes more effort, but God will provide it. You can make a difference by being a good parent to your child, or mentor to another child. You can protect the name of God by the way you use it, it just takes more courage than doing what everyone else does. You can be the person who gets to participate in changing someone's eternity by unholstering the message of forgiveness through Jesus. God's kingdom isn't the just a distant goal, it's a vibrant advancing joyful kingdom which exist right here and now. So don't be intimidated, or give up because of the weeds!

Yet Jesus also tells this parable so that we understand that there are certain things he doesn't want us to do in order to advance his kingdom. Look again at verse 28 **"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. "**

While in one sense God's kingdom is here, in another sense, his kingdom is still to come. It isn't complete yet. It will not be complete until sin and unbelief are removed. We can help this to happen through our witness and Christian living, but it will not be complete until sin and the enemies of Christ are forcibly removed. God has not called us to do this. That's his job. In other words, we do not, simply because we are believers, have the right to hurt, kill, harm, or destroy the reputations of unbelievers in the name of advancing his kingdom. God has not given us authority to go out and bomb abortion clinics, even though the acts performed there are evil. He has not given us the command, or authority to walk into our local school library and burn all the books that teach the theory of evolution, even though such books might be harmful to a person's faith. God does not give us the right to execute muslim clerics, even though they might advocate doing the same to us. He has not given us the instruction to form a Christian militia to overthrow our government and institute rule by the Bible. Being a Christian entitles us to none of these things.

Now let me clarify, he has given the government authority to harm, or take possessions, or even life in the interest of keeping people from bodily harm and promoting good order. And so it could be that a government might arrest a doctor who assisted in a suicide, or a cleric who carried out a crime, and that government official carrying out these acts of justice might well also be a Christian, but he does not give Christians simply because they are Christians blanket authority to stomp out unbelief by force. And he has a good reason for this. Jesus explains: **because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.**

Brothers and sisters, the desire to say "I've had it" and lash out is a real one for any of us – to want to beat up the pornographer who abuses young girls, to cuss back at the neighbor who berates you, to wish the worst for those who try and tear down people of faith. But look back on history, and you will see that Jesus is right. Every time Christians have taken up arms – not in defense of their own lives – but with the misguided idea of advancing God's kingdom on earth by force, the results have been disastrous. Think of the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the forced Christianization of early native groups in South America, or the more recent bombing of clinics and murder of homosexuals. Did the crusades persuade the Muslims to convert? Did the Spanish Inquisition produce more faithful believers? Have the clinic bombings convinced more people that life begins at conception? Has the murder of homosexuals caused any to go back into the Bible and seriously consider its teachings? No. These kinds of acts drive people even further from Christ, and what they sometimes have done is caused weak Christians to say, "If that is what people calling themselves Christians do, then I certainly don't want to be one of them." The wheat ends up being uprooted with the weeds. Brothers and sisters, it is natural for the declining morality of the world to anger us, it should anger us, but we must remember that God is the one who will complete his kingdom. ³⁹**The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.** ⁴⁰**"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.** ⁴¹**The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.** ⁴²**They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** ⁴³**Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.**

The kingdom of God – it's like a wheat field full of weeds. Christians are the wheat, those opposed to the Christians faith are the weeds. So what should we do about the weeds? First, don't be intimidated or scared of the weeds. God's kingdom will continue to advance in spite of them. Be bold in your walk of faith and in your witness. Second, don't try to advance his kingdom by pulling the weeds – that is, don't use force or support the use of force to harm, humiliate, or kill God's enemies thinking it will make his kingdom grow. Leave that to God. "He who has ears let him hear." AMEN.