

“Reap for Joy”

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the farming community, harvest time is their Super Bowl. All the hard work of the year—the blood, sweat, and tears—has finally brought reward (and relief) as they bring in the fruit of their labors. It’s a time of joy, just as it is for the team who wins the Super Bowl, who get the confetti, parades, and celebrations as they leap for joy at the consummation of their efforts. There’s a big difference, though, between the Super Bowl, harvest time, and the great harvest of souls that the Lord speaks about in our text this morning. The problem for the farmers and the players in those other two scenarios, is that they have to go right back to work. The joy of their victory is short-lived, and leaves them with only momentary joy that fades with the prospect of the work that is to come in order to do it all over again next year. Their “leap for joy” is temporary and turns to a daily grind that gives them only the hope of reaching the same goal next year.

But, the harvest of souls is not a temporary, fleeting thing. It isn’t a brief “leap for joy” that ends with nothing but more work and effort on the part of the reaper. It is final, complete, and eternally joyous, or eternally agonizing. The Lord of the harvest will send His angels to gather the weeds of the world and cast them into the fires of hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Having cleared the weeds away from His wheat, He will then gather His righteous into His barn where they will shine in everlasting joy and bliss. This joy is not fleeting, nor is it one that will fade away. He has promised that you will be among His wheat that is gathered up because He has claimed you as His own dear child in your baptism. In the fulfillment of His promise, you will find that great joy as you shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father. When Christ comes on the clouds of heaven with His angel host at His command, He will “reap for joy”—a joy that will never end, and one that will bring His holy people into the great presence of His Father and our Father, the one true God who “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things (Rom. 11:36).”

As Jesus says to His disciples, the weeds that will be gathered and burned are the sons of the evil one, having been sown among His fields of wheat that should have been doing nothing but soaking up the shining sun. The Lord sowed a perfect field, but the devil sowed his seeds of evil that grew weeds and choked out and overtook some of His wheat, as the Parable of the Sower spoke of last week. That is the danger of living in a world marred by sin, which your human frailty brought into the world through the sin of Adam. Your sinful flesh wants to be like the weeds of the field. It wants you to believe

that the weeds receive more sun, more water, and thrive in this world better than the wheat of the field. It's just easier for weeds to grow. They can be sustained by the least valuable soil, minimal water, and minimal sun. So, why not take the easy path? That is the question your sinful nature wants you to answer with a resounding, "Sure thing."

Walking the path of righteousness is not easy, and the devil sows his seeds of evil and doubt every chance he gets. You cannot walk the path of righteousness on your own. You cannot sustain yourself as the wheat of the field. You must be watered, fed, and cared for by a farmer. That is why David proclaims to the Lord in Psalm 119:34-36, "Give me understanding, that I may keep Your Law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!" Your every inclination of the heart is to selfish gain, so it is the Lord that must lead you, the Lord that must turn you away from the desires of the flesh, and bring you into understanding of His will. Without His work of removing the stain of sin from your flesh, you would be lost to the weeds of the world. He must point you to the truth and He must bring you the delight that comes to your inner being in the joy of His Law which is good and right.

Don't allow yourself to be the victim of the devil. You cannot defeat him of your own volition, but you can avoid the pitfalls of giving in to the temptations he seeks to use to pull you away from your only salvation. The only way you can do that is through faith, and by the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to you only for His sake. Sin is everywhere in this world. It is all around you everywhere you turn, and if you allow yourself to take the easy path of the world, succumbing to the fallacies of Satan that you can do this on your own and you don't need God, you will wither among the weeds and find yourself being reaped for agony instead of reaped for joy. Everyone has the ability to lose their faith. Not one person has the ability to avoid it on their own. Your faith is a gift, and it is one that if not fed by the food of the Lord Almighty, will fade and be swallowed up by the powers of this world.

But you are not the one who feeds your faith. You are not the one who has to give yourself water, sun, and soil. As Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." Jesus brings you the water of life, because He is the water of life. He is the farmer who cultivates the land and cares for the wheat of His field. You live already in His kingdom and at the end of the age when He sends His angels to reap His harvest, He will first gather up all causes of sin and law-breakers and remove them from His field. The comfort of the Christian is to know that even this world which is so full of debauchery, sin, and evil is ruled by the King of Kings

as He sits upon His heavenly throne. This is not the kingdom of the devil, and as one who has been adopted into the sonship of your heavenly Father, the evil one has no power over you. The Spirit of Christ dwells in you, and as Paul says in Romans 8:9, “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”

So, as believers in the one true God, you dwell for now among the weeds that have been sown into the world, but that does not mean that you dwell here alone. Those who do not belong to Christ will be ripped out from the root and thrown into the fire, and you will be left shining like the sun, because you shine with the righteousness of Jesus. His righteousness is your righteousness, and that is never more obvious to you as His child than in receiving His Means of Grace. Satan uses complexity and lies to sow chaos and doubt, but the Son of God sows tranquility and peace through simple means. Through bread and wine, water, and Word, He brings to you the peace of the forgiveness of your sins—a task that seems simple enough on the surface, but cost Him everything in order to win that gift on your behalf. That free gift which He has given to each and every one of you only because of His grace and mercy belongs to you now as you look with eager hearts to the day of His reaping.

The Lord of the Harvest will on that day send His angels out into the world to gather His people, bringing them the joy of the new heaven and the new earth, as perfection is finally known among God’s elect. Until that day, we receive a great foretaste of that perfection every time we gather around His Means of Grace. As one who has been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, you don’t have to wonder about when the Lord will send His reaping angels or what the outcome of that reaping will be. When you come to the Lord’s table where He brings you His Holy Supper and you taste and see that the Lord is good, you are assured of your place in His Kingdom. In receiving His very body and blood, you are given forgiveness, life, and salvation, and by faith you grasp hold of that reality even now as you await that glorious day of His Parousia (second coming).

By His blood, He has redeemed the world, and for those who have rejected His free gift of grace, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth as they are cast into the eternal fiery furnace. There is only one hope for mankind, and that hope is not in yourselves, because if it is then all mankind is doomed. The only goodness that dwells in you is one that dwells in you by virtue of your baptism into Christ’s death, where He shed His blood to purify you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. His righteousness is your righteousness because He dwells within you as His own dear child. So, on the day of judgment, when the angels come to do their Lord’s bidding, the Father who judges all hearts will look upon you and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been

faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master (Matt. 25:23).” Because of the faithfulness of the One who lives in you, you will join the saints that have gone before you, who also wait for that glorious day.

When you finally stand before your Heavenly Father, it will be just as Jesus says in Revelation 3:5, where He reveals to the Apostle John, “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot His name out of the Book of Life. I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels.” Everlasting joy awaits you in His heavenly presence, and when He comes to “reap for joy,” the Father will bring all of His children into the light of His eternal glory, gathering His wheat into His barn. You will see with eyes that truly see, and hear with ears that truly hear. You will see His face, and hear His voice. You will eat the feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which shall have no end, and together with all the saints and angels, sing praises to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, forevermore singing, “This is the feast of victory for our God! Alleluia!” Amen.