

"Hope in the midst of Weeds"

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

July 17, 2005

Hope is a wonderful thing. It is a major subject in our second lesson today and something that I believe that is so very important for us in our days. Hope is critical for our lives - sometimes it is the one thing that keeps us moving forward – and yet too often it is lacking. I looked in my files under the subject of hope and found some fun things.

I might as well start with the one that is sure to get me in trouble. It was the story of a married couple who had a big disagreement that escalated into a harsh argument before the wife left the room in tears. A short time later she return and placidly said, "I've changed my mind." To which the husband responded without looking away from the TV. "Well, thank heavens. I sure hope it's working better now!" Hope is a wonderful thing.

Little Sally Brown from the Peanuts cartoon is on the phone with Linus and she is mad. A new little girl had moved into the neighborhood and Linus had been a bit too welcoming. Sally shouts through the phone: "Oh you're a fine one, you are! I've always been nice to you. But did you care? NO you didn't! And now a new girl moves in and smiles once at you and you give her your blanket!! Oh, You're a fine one, you are! You know what I hope??? I hope you have a nervous breakdown. That's what I hope!!" On the other end of the phone Linus quivers: "You must be a good hoper"

Are you a good hoper? Does hope run deep within you so that you can see past the difficult situations we encounter in life and find peace because of the hope that you have?

One of my favorite old stories is of two young men named Sam and Jed who ran across an article in a magazine that told of a bounty that was being offered in the amount of \$5000 for every wolf that was captured alive and brought in. These men decided that they would make their fortune by capturing wolves for the \$5000 bounty. It was not an easy task but they set about scouring the mountains and forests in search of wolves. They were have no luck at all. One night they were exhausted and both fell deeply asleep beside their campfire dreaming of the fortune they hoped to make. In the middle of the night Sam was suddenly awakened from sleep and looked out into the forest only to see the flaming eyes

and bared teeth of about 50 wolves pacing nearby. Sam cautiously reached over and nudged his friend and said: "Wake up, Jed! We're rich!"

The Apostle Paul again writes with beautiful and powerful words. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." Amazing how can a person look beyond the struggles to an incredible future? Paul talks about hope. Paul speaks about a hope founded in something that can not be seen or understood - a hope that allows us to wait patiently for the future good to be revealed. Can you have a hope that it outweighs the present suffering?

Jesus tells another farm parable. Good wheat seed has been planted and begins to grow. But suddenly someone notices that not everything in the field is wheat. Scattered throughout the field all around them they begin to notice that there are also weeds growing in the midst of the wheat. What are you going to do? Any good farmer today would probably be quick to dismiss the advice Jesus gives because there are ways of controlling those pesky weeds in the wheat. There are great chemicals that are so smart that they target the weeds and leave the wheat to grow in peace. It amazes me that such selective targeting of the weeds is possible. Of course that assumes that it is not raining all of the time and you can get into the field at the right time. Not being a good farmer myself, I would guess that there are other factors that could also make the control of weed impossible. On a year like this, it is easy to get discouraged by the weeds in the wheat.

And, of course, Jesus is talking about more than just a field of wheat. He is talking about life in this world. "Weeds" of all kinds exist in our world and we long to rush in to uproot the weeds. But there is not chemical to randomly spray that will selectively destroy the weeds. It is often times so discouraging to see the weeds revealed in our world. With evil intent, people place bombs in London subways and on busses. A man kidnaps young children and sexually assaults or even kills, suicide bombers take many innocent lives. Yes, it is so discouraging to see the weeds begin to show themselves and we would love to rush in and rip out the weeds. But how? And then there are so many varieties of weeds - some come in human form, planted by an enemy - but other weeds also steal the energy and life of the wheat. The joy, beauty and productivity of life is stolen by too much rain and too many mosquitoes, homes surrounded by sandbags and basements with too much water beginning to grow mold, hurricanes, tornadoes, hail, not to even get started on medical struggles and the deaths of loved ones – and I am sure the list could go on and on as we think of the things that we might identify as weeds in our world.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the whole creation waits with eager longing to be set free from its bondage to decay - waits for the day when the weeds will be eliminated. As a part of that creation, we all long for the day when the weeds are gone. But Jesus tells us to wait and be patient. It is too easy for us to destroy the wheat. So many have taken it upon themselves to eliminate those whom they

identify as weeds. Whether it be thru a person like Adolph Hitler or an organization like Al-Qaida or by the use of capital punishment we what to rush to do the weeding. But Jesus says 'wait' - 'be patient'. Not that we are suppose to ignore evil or struggle to keep the fields clean. We must do that as we are able. But ultimately it is God who will deal with the weeds and in the mean time we are invited to cry out to our Heavenly Father - "Abba Father" - as we long for all of creation to be set free from it's bondage to sin and brokenness.

In this time there will always be weeds in the wheat. But God invites us into a life of hope. God will triumph! We are the children of a mighty God. We are heirs, with Jesus Christ, to a glory that is yet to be revealed. Hope placed in God is a hope that is well placed. Live in hope!

AMEN