

**V EPIPHANY 2014**  
**SERMON – CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**COL. 3.12 ST. MATT. 13.24**



The Church is a mixed bag, just like the wheat and weeds...God will sort things out in the end.

Throughout the Epiphany Season we have read the Gospel accounts about the epiphanies...the striking appearances...of Jesus that reveal to us the truth about who he is...God's own dear Son. And they reveal to us God's ultimate plan for redeeming humankind from itself...saving humankind from sin and death through the life, work and death of Jesus.

Some of these epiphanies...these striking appearances...such as the Baptism of Jesus were witnessed by many people. Others such as the coming of the Magi on the Epiphany, Paul's conversion on the Road to Damascus, and the Presentation of Jesus to Simeon in the Temple, were of a much more personal nature.

On this Fifth and final Sunday after the Epiphany this year we read a parable Jesus says is about the kingdom of heaven. The parable is the story about a farmer who plants some seed. While he and his workers were asleep, his competitor sabotages the farmer's crop by planting some weeds. When the sabotage is discovered, the farmer tells his workers to wait until harvest time before doing anything. He doesn't want to risk losing his good crop of wheat trying to get rid of the weeds.

At first glance it's hard to see how this parable has anything to do with epiphanies...striking appearances. But if we apply the imagery to the Church, which we often call our experience of heaven on earth, then things become clearer. The Church is a mixed bag of people, a microcosm of the secular world. The Church is made up of people who are called by God to live in peace and love, and show that love in the way Saint Paul says we should in his Letter to the Colossians.

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians to correct some errors in teaching by some of the members of the church. He tells them they shouldn't try to impress people with strict ceremonies or rituals. Instead, the One they should try to impress is God himself, by acting toward others in the way Jesus acts toward us...by showing unconditional love.

We would like to think that everyone in the Church gets that message and acts accordingly. But when we let ego and self-interests get in the way...we become like the guy who sabotaged the farmer's wheat crop...we can stifle the Church's mission and growth...and risk losing our own reward in heaven. Knowing this, we are going to want to make some changes in our lives so we can grow up healthy and strong with the rest of the wheat.

All of us who have been called to be the Church should be acting perfectly all the time in every aspect of our lives in the way Paul says we should. In practice, that's easier said than done. Perfection in anything we do is impossible without consistent and hard work. Perfection in our relationship with others...especially within the Church...is what we strive for...and what we pray for in the Collect for Purity when we ask God to clean our hearts and minds so we will be able to love him perfectly as we should, and extend that love to others.

But if the Church is indeed a mixed bag, what do we when we see someone misbehaving? We need to take action to correct bad behavior...beginning with our own if necessary. And we must always act out of love and compassion...and with patience...not being judgmental. Jesus came to put everyone...EVERYONE...right with God the Father. We need to do our part to make certain no one...NO ONE...gets left out as a result of our own bad behavior.

The parable of the wheat and weeds directs our attention toward the final epiphany...the final striking appearance...of Jesus on the last day. Final judgment, Saint Paul tells us in his First Letter to the Corinthians, must "wait until the day the Lord comes, when he will bring to light the dark secrets and expose the hidden purposes of people's minds. And everyone will receive from God the praise he deserves."

It's not up to us to exclude people from heaven...or from the Church...because we don't like them or think they are troublemakers. But because we are God's people, it is up to us to do what Saint Paul tells us to do: be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, and forgiving each another. The rest is quite simply up to God.

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