

9th Sun. after Pent.
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There are hypocrites in the church!

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Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever heard a conversation like this one? “How come you never shop at HyVee?” “Well, I used to. But that place was just full of hypocrites so I never go there anymore.” You haven’t heard that, have you?

Or: “Why don’t you go to Husker games anymore?” “Well, I started to notice that there were some fans there that really weren’t fans at all. They just sat there and didn’t cheer. They didn’t have the Husker paraphernalia. Some looked like they were there to socialize instead of watch the game. I couldn’t deal with such hypocrites, so I quit going to games.” Does that make sense?

Or how about this one: “I heard you dropped out of college. Why?” “Well, you know I noticed some of my classmates weren’t serious about studying. Some people goofed off in class. One classmate even flunked out. All of these people claimed to be there to study and learn, but they were just a bunch of hypocrites, so I dropped out of school.” That argument isn’t logical, is it?

Yet, if you ask people who don’t go to church why they don’t go to church, they’ll tell you time and again, “The church is just full of hypocrites!” And here’s my response. It’s the title of the message today: There *are* hypocrites in church. There truly are. Maybe there’s someone who hasn’t been in church for a long time and you came today and you’re sitting there with your mouth wide open. “Did the preacher just admit there are hypocrites in the church?” Yes, I did. Without a doubt there are hypocrites in the church. And this fact should not influence you in the least in deciding whether or not *you* go to church.

A well-known Christian writer, Zig Ziglar, said that he invited a friend to go to church with him. The man answered, “Well, I’d like to go. But the church is so full of hypocrites.” Ziglar replied, “That’s okay. There’s always room for one more.”

So today I want to look with you at a portion of Scripture where Jesus himself acknowledged that there will be hypocrites in the church. He tells us *why* we will find them in the church. And he tells us what our response should be to this fact that there are hypocrites in the church.

We turn our attention to the Gospel lesson we heard earlier. Jesus told a parable to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like. You see, God is the king of all things. He rules all. What is rule like? Why does he rule the way he does? These are fascinating questions, and in parable after parable, Jesus answered them. In this parable, the God’s rule is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But at night while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds in among the wheat. As the crop began to grow, the weeds became more and more evident.

The servants were confused. They knew the master sowed good seed. Where did all the weeds come from? The master knew: An enemy did it. The servants asked, “Should we go pull up the weeds?” “

“No! Because you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters to collect the weeds and bundle them to be burn. And they will gather the wheat and take it into the barn.

What does this mean?

This parable explains to us two very important things: Why are there hypocrites in the church? And, what are we to do about the hypocrites in the church?

But first let's define what a hypocrite is, because we use that word sometimes in the broad sense and sometimes in the narrow sense. In the broad sense, a hypocrite is one who claims to believe one thing, but does another. Under that definition, we're all hypocrites at times, aren't we? We believe that God will provide for all our needs, yet sometimes we act as though he will not. We believe that Jesus removes the guilt of all our sins, yet we still feel guilt over a certain big sin we committed in the past and doubt it can be forgiven. That's hypocrisy in the broad sense. We all are tempted by Satan and sometimes we don't resist. We struggle with sin. And we sometimes label that hypocrisy. But that's really too broad a definition, and today I'm using the word in the narrow sense.

Being a hypocrite in the strict sense of the word is when a person pretends to be a Christian, pretends to be a believer, but is actually not one. They come to church, they say the prayers, they sing the songs, they play the part. But in their heart there is no true faith in Jesus Christ. That's the narrow and true definition of the word.

Now the truth is, in the church, there are not only Christians struggling with sin. There are also people pretending to be Christians who really aren't. **Why is this?** Where did they come from?

Listen to Jesus' explanation. The one sowing the good seed is **Jesus** himself. The field is **the world**. The good seeds he sows are **true believers** in God. The wheat represents believers. But in this world, there are also weeds --- **unbelievers**. Where did they come? **Satan** (which means adversary or enemy) **planted** them. They are his work, not God's work.

It's just that simple. Why are there hypocrites? Because of Satan. God wants all people to be saved, but Satan wants all people to be lost. The unfortunate fact is that sometimes people harden their hearts and they will not believe in the one true God. When a person rejects God and turns their back on him, that is not God's work. That is the devil's work. He is at work in the world to destroy faith, just as God is at work in the world creating faith. Why are their unbelievers and hypocrites? Because Satan is actively opposing the will and work and grace of God. It's that simple. And where would Satan work the hardest but in the church?

And here's the thing: a child of the devil can sometimes very much look like a child of God. A hypocrite is often not evident. Because faith is a matter of the heart, and the heart is not visible to man, hypocrites are not visible to you and to I.

So Jesus tells us this fact: There are hypocrites in the church! Believers and unbelievers live together in this world... and even in the church. And it's not always easy to tell the difference between the two.

Now the next question: what are we to do about the weeds? Are we to root out the unbelievers? Is it up to us to judge what is in the hearts of people? Ever heard of the Spanish Inquisition? That's just one of many examples of times when the church tried to root out the hypocrites and unbelievers. The atrocities were horrifying. But Jesus taught something completely different.

In the parable, the servants asked Jesus: “Should we go root out the weeds?” In other words, believers wonder, “Should we try to figure out who is faking it and kick them out of the church? And Jesus said, “No! In pulling out the weeds you may also pull out some wheat. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I’ll tell the harvesters to go out and collect the weeds to be burned, and the wheat to be brought into the barn.”

In other words, in trying to root out the hypocrites, we will inevitably also uproot some true believers. Jesus tells us clearly: It’s not our job to judge a person’s heart, and render a verdict about their salvation. We cannot see the heart. God is the judge.

Now understand right: Jesus does tell us to call sin what it is: sin... rebellion against God. We are not to turn a blind eye to the sins others commit. And when a person does wrong, God wants us to lovingly correct them, lead them to repentance and then share Christ’s forgiveness.

But God doesn’t want us to judge the person’s heart or motives. Here’s the difference. Someone does sin. Let’s say a fellow believer is gossiping. In love you privately remind them that ruining someone’s reputation through gossip violates the will of God. The fellow believer who sinned says, “You’re right. I shouldn’t have done it. I’m sorry.” Then you say, “Sorry isn’t going to cut it! I know you don’t mean it! I will see to it that you are kicked out of this church!” That’s where the line was crossed, and the person pretended to know what was in the heart of another. That we cannot do. If a person confesses their faith, we must take them at their word. One day the Judge will deal with those who are lying.

Let us follow the words of Jesus: never judge the heart or motives of a fellow believer. Take them at their word.

Conclusion: So, are their hypocrites in the church? Yes, there are. Why would God tolerate this? (1) It’s just for a time. If the injustice of the situation gets you down, keep your eyes focused on that day when it will all be set straight. (2) God tolerates this because his church is there to proclaim his truth: *His truth which turns unbelievers and hypocrites into believers*. If there are hypocrites in the church it’s only because the church exists to invite sinners in to repent and received the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. People are under the mistaken impression that a church is a museum of saints. If you want to see really good people who have it all figured out and are serving the Lord and people with joy and eagerness all the time, well then, the church is where you need to go! That notion is completely false. The church is not a museum of saints. Rather, it is a hospital for the sick.

You wouldn’t go into the hospital and then announce your dismay that there are sick people there, would you! Look at this hospital! There are people with diseases, and broken bones, and cancer and heart disease... why I thought hospitals are supposed to make people whole and healthy!” Ridiculous, right? The hospital is where people who are sick go so they can be restored to health.

So also, the church is for the sin-sick soul. We come to Jesus for healing, rest and forgiveness. So if you see people in the church and they seem to be hypocrites, or they seem to be sinners... praise God! They are exactly where they need to be to be healed by Jesus. To receive forgiveness. To be unburdened of their guilt. To be strengthened in their faith. So they can be connected to Jesus and walk closer to him the remaining days of their life.

Friends, let us not be judgmental. Let us love as Christ loved. Accept everyone and share with them the law of God and to those who repent, his comforting Good News too! God is the judge... not you and I. Be patient. The harvest is coming! Amen.