July 18/19, 2026
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
Isaiah 44:6-11
The True God Keeps You Growing

Growing up, I had a small vegetable garden in our backyard. We planted green beans, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, zucchini and squash. It's something that I still cherish as I think back to my childhood. Fond memories of helping plant the seeds and harvesting the full-grown food.

Now that I'm grown up and have a family of my own, you can imagine my excitement when we decided to plant our own garden this past May. Seeds went into the freshly tilled soil, and everything looked great. It wasn't too long until the first sprouts started shooting above the soil. My excitement and contentment increased. Things were going exactly as I had hoped.

And, then, seemingly overnight, it happened. I was most worried about the rabbits getting in, even with the protection of a fence. But, rabbits haven't been my garden's worst enemy. It's been the weeds. Seemingly overnight, they invaded every inch of soil that wasn't already being used by the growing sprouts. My vegetables have been coexisting with weeds all summer long.

But, guess what? The vegetables have been thriving. How so? They've been getting their necessities: sun, water, and air. The things God created to help plants grow have been keeping the plants growing despite the weeds.

In our gospel today, Jesus taught a parable. As he does with parables, he takes a well-known earthly thing to illustrate and teach a spiritual truth. This particular truth is the reality that just as plants and weeds will grow side by side until the harvest is done, believers and unbelievers will cohabitate this world side by side until Judgment Day.

And, that can be frustrating. It can be unsettling. It can be downright scary as we consider the persecution and the evil we're up against as wheat living among weeds. Jesus comforts us in the gospel by directing our focus to the future. There's a time coming when we will be free of the weeds. We hold on to that hope.

Our sermon text from Isaiah adds additional comfort and encouragement by helping us focus on the present. Yes, we live as wheat among weeds. We are surrounded by evil and persecution and temptation. But, someone greater surrounds us. He is the true God. And, despite the threat of the weeds around us, he keeps us growing so we might arrive at our heavenly destination.

How great it is to know we have *the* True God on our side. Just consider who he is for a moment. Isaiah directs our attention to several aspects of who God is and what he does for us. Listen again and catch some of who God is. **"This is what the LORD says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and the last, apart from me there is no God."** And, a little later on, **"Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."**

Who is the One who keeps us growing? He is the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love. He is the only just and true ruler throughout the history of the world. He is the one who redeemed Israel from Egypt and who has bought us back from the slavery of the devil and sin and death. He is the one ruling everything in heaven and on earth. He is the only eternal. He is a firm foundation. I'm glad he's on my side because of what he does for me. I'm sure the same is true for you.

And, yet, human beings are forgetful. We know how true that is which is why we so easily see ourselves in the people of the Old Testament who often forgot how powerful God was and how much they needed to rely on him and could rely on him. Which is why God does what he often does: reminds his people of the past deliverances. Sometimes very specifically. Sometime, like here, generally. **"Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people."**

God's saying 2 things here. First, he's attacking the foolishness of idolatry. Idols are inanimate. They cannot proclaim what's happened in the past, let alone the future. Second, he's helping his people recall the power and love of God in the past. How he has been keeping his people growing from ancient time despite all the enemies that tried to prevail against God and his people.

And, it's a very important thing that God is saying this now because of what is coming very soon. The people of Judah are about to be carted off to Babylon. They are about to drastically live as wheat among weeds: even more false gods, greater temptations to flee from their faith. How could they ever expect to keep growing in the faith and living as God's children when they were surrounded by weeds?

I know the importance of weeding a garden. You need to give plants their space. You need to allow the roots to grow without competition. And, yet, even when we weren't able to weed our garden as much as we wanted, the plants still thrived because of the most powerful things plants need: sun, water, and air.

It's a blessing to be surrounded by Christian family and friends. There is biblical, godly wisdom in having more Christian friends and unbelieving friends. But, at the same time, the reality is we will all have family and friends who don't believe. And coworkers. And neighbors. And, random people we end up talking to.

Which is why we pray, "Lord, keep me growing in the faith despite the weeds around me." And, just as plants thrive due to the 3 necessities even as they fight for room against weeds, your faith in Jesus will thrive when you rely on the true God to keep you growing. The weeds in this world are nothing compared to his power.

Interestingly, there's 3 main things that God uses to keep you growing. And, these 3 main things will continue to exist despite however many weeds will try to infiltrate your life. The true God keeps you growing by using his gospel in (1) Word and (2) Baptism and (3) the Lord's Supper. Contrary to what the world would say, these aren't fool's gold. They are part of God's promise. Later in Isaiah he says, **"(My Word) will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."** (Isaiah 55:11) The purpose of Word and Sacraments is to keep you growing no matter what else is going on against you in your life. Make use of them and you're letting the true God keep you growing.

God doesn't make it complicated. He actually makes it easy to keep you growing. He's blessed you with the 3rd Commandment as a reminder of the importance of being in his Word, particularly being regularly in worship. And, in worship, you get what you need to keep growing. You obviously get the Word. At the beginning of worship, you're reminded of your baptism when you hear the words, **"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."** And, regularly, you come to receive the Lord's Supper. God's keeping you growing!

And, you need that. Because as great as this place is and as great as your personal time with Jesus is on a daily basis, you spend most of your time with the weeds. Which means you spend most of your time with temptation. There's certainly the temptations to disobey all the commandments. But, today, we want to focus on the temptation to disobey commandment number 1. **"You shall have no other gods."** After all, God says in our lesson, **"Apart from me there is no God."**

And, yet, there are so many other false gods out there vying for our time and attention, and our sinful nature grabs hold of them. These gods aren't necessarily fashioned by our hands. No, they are fashioned in our minds. Our minds conceive these gods to be what help us truly grow and thrive and succeed in this life.

These gods are our jobs, our hobbies, our earthly reputation that doesn't ruffle feathers when it comes to religion, and our money. On the surface, those who run after these things and achieve them seem to really be growing. Just like what we see in gardens, the weeds seem to be the ones thriving. And, so, we too easily want to run after them as well thinking that will either be the thing to make me grow or at least to complete my growing. And, in so doing, we forget the True God who keeps us growing, and we forget whom he has called us to be.

Isaiah proclaims in our lesson, **"All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame."** The only growing that such gods are good for is temporary growing. Like a weed, things might grow quickly, but it's all gone so soon.

Where are those gods and what good are they when you lose a loved one? When guilt of past sins resurfaces? When friends turn on you? When death comes knocking on your door and you stand before God's judgment seat? The weeds call out to these gods again and again. The only thing growing for them is terror and shame at the end of time.

Which is why we so often repent of such sins. And, we turn to the True God who is faithful and true and forgives all our sins and immediately keeps us growing again. We repent of putting our trust and love and respect in things we fashion in our minds rather than the God who fashioned us as the crown of his creation.

Such threats and temptations will never go away this side of heaven. Good thing our true God isn't going away either. He is the first and the last, perfectly reigning on our behalf as he constantly reminds us of our spiritual freedom from all evil.

And, so, we're content to live among the weeds because we have God's promise to keep on growing with him taking care of us. And, on top of that, what better way to witness than as a wheat living among weeds?

When unbelievers are brought to shame because their gods fail them in times of disaster, who better to pick them up than you who has the True God to lift them up as well? When unbelievers try to get the best of you by picking on you, but they fail because you are content as a child of God, who better to share with them the hope and contentment you have? Keep in mind, at the harvest at the end of time, we want as much wheat as possible rather than weeds. That is God's will, and so it's ours. God desires we live as wheat among weeds so we might be his witnesses to all.

When you pull out of church later on and see the corn fields across the street and other crop fields on the way home, and whenever you see plants growing in the future, marvel at God's creation and the power he has in keeping all things living. More importantly, marvel at his power in your life to keep you living and growing in the faith despite all the threats. God's power and love is so evident in the truth that we live as wheat among weeds. It's not just evident in that we keep on growing but that by God keeping us growing, some who are weeds will also become wheat all by the true God's power. Amen.