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Deeds, Not Creeds. It's not your beliefs that make you a good person, it's your behavior. Have you ever heard slogans like those? They can sound very pious. They can seem correct. After all, if someone is out there murdering people and then claiming they are a Christian, that just doesn't add up, right? Faith does bring repentance. But that is not the whole story. In fact, that's not even the most important part of the story. Today, as we look at Jesus' parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, we will see that Faith is the Only Difference.

Last week, in the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Jesus showed us four results of the preaching of the gospel: hardening, falling away because of the Word, lack of fruit because of the desire for the good life, and finally the Word producing 100, 60, or 30 times what was sown.

Dramatic as those differences are, today Jesus shows us that it is quite difficult for us to spot those differences. In the parable before us, Jesus speaks about wheat and darnel. Jesus doesn't say, "weeds." Instead, he talks about a specific plant called darnel. Darnel looks almost exactly like wheat right up until the fruit of the plant appears. Only at that point can you easily tell the difference between the wheat and the darnel. Until modern sorting machinery, darnel was a huge problem for wheat farmers. There wasn't a good way to tell the difference between the good crops and the bad until it had already grown up.

With this parable, Jesus explains that this is the world we live in. As Christians, we are the people of the kingdom, yet we are surrounded by the people of the evil one. And it is quite difficult to tell who is who. Often the two, different as they are, will look exactly alike. We can judge people by their actions and by their confessions of faith, but we cannot see into their hearts. We may see two people struggling with a gross sin, yet one through faith is fighting that sin, while the other in unbelief has given up that fight. We may see two very kind and generous people who regularly come to church and Bible study, yet one through faith holds to Christ for salvation, while the other in unbelief trusts in their own self-righteousness.

We cannot tell the difference in this life between believers and unbelievers. Again, we can judge people by their actions and by their outward confessions, but we

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cannot see into their hearts.

Nevertheless, Jesus tells us there is a huge distinction between believers and unbelievers; a distinction that we will know only on Judgment Day. In the parable, Jesus does not let his servants sort out believers and unbelievers until the harvest day, until Judgment Day. On that day, those who reject Jesus will become obvious because they will be sent to hell, to suffer complete abandonment from God for all eternity. Those who have faith in Jesus will also become obvious because they will spend eternity in heaven, enjoying God's rich blessing for all eternity.

What greater difference could there be between people than those who will spend eternity in heaven and those who will spend it in hell? No other distinction matters in the end. Democrat or republican? Educated or not? One nationality or another? Man or woman? Wise or foolish? Rich or poor? Child or adult? These distinctions are important now, but none of them will amount to anything in eternity. The people of the kingdom and the people of the evil one, however, that distinction will mean everything.

What makes *that* distinction? It is only faith. It seems like such a small difference. It seems so insignificant. Shouldn't the difference be how sincere a person was? Shouldn't the difference be how much the person has actually done to serve their fellowman or not? Shouldn't the difference be those who are really living their faith rather than those who only claim to be? If those things were the distinction, the wheat and the weeds would look a lot more different, wouldn't they? We'd be able to tell the difference between believers and unbelievers. We'd be able to weed out the people of the evil one.

Faith in Christ is the only difference. Jesus describes this in the parables in verses 31-35. Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed... Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants." Faith in Christ seems like such an insignificant thing, especially compared to our works! Our strivings and efforts, our behaviors and actions seem so much bigger, so much weightier. But a man who was crucified 2000 years ago? A splash of water on an infant? Eating bread and drinking wine? Reading an ancient book? Those things seem like nothing, don't they?

But God's promise gives them power. God tells us that the gospel, in Word

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and Sacrament, is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. It is God's almighty Word that made the universe out of nothing and it is God's almighty Word that transforms corrupt sinners into God's people. It is God's almighty Word that creates faith in the hearts of unbelievers like we used to be. It is God's almighty Word that grows that faith in our hearts so that we produce 100 or 60 or 30 times what was sown. It is God's almighty Word that accomplishes that through the words of the Bible, through baptism, and through the Lord's Supper.

This is what draws us to church and to the Word and to the Lord's Supper: because here we find God's almighty promise. Here God grants and grows our faith. Here God forgives sins. Here God produces fruit in us, like despairing of our own righteousness and trusting in Christ alone, fruits like forgiving the undeserving because our God has forgiven us even though we never deserve it.

We do not come to God's Word because we are better than other people. In fact, it could be said that we are worse than other people, because we ought to know better than the unbelieving world! We come to God's Word because we know that we are just as sinful as anyone else and we can just as easily fall into the grossest and most damnable of sins.

We can look at ourselves and recognize that we look very much like one of those weeds. But it is not our looks that make us wheat or weeds. It is not our behavior or our deeds. It is God's promise that saves us from eternal hellfire. It is God's promise that produces 100, 60, or 30 times what God has sown.

This leads us back to God's Word, leads us back to the Lord's Supper, leads us to remember our baptism; because there God gives and grows faith in us, so that we might be certain that through Christ we will be found to be wheat on the day of harvest; we will be found to be the people of the kingdom on Judgment Day. We do not need to fear hell because Christ has saved us from it.

This leads us to put God's Word into practice; because God's almighty Word transforms our eternal lives and it transforms our lives of sin into lives of repentance and obedience to God's will. Again, we will often still look just like the weeds do, but we trust in God to grow our faith. We trust in God to produce the fruit he desires in us.

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So what would you say? Deeds, not creeds? It's not your belief, it's your behavior? No deeds you can do can change a weed into wheat. No behavior can save us from hell. But the creed about Jesus who died on the cross to take away our sins? That can. The belief that God through Word and sacrament continues to assure you that all the blessings Jesus earned for you are truly yours? That can. Let that belief lead you to a humble behavior of repentance. Let that creed lead you to deeds of obedience. Because in the end, Faith is the Only Difference. Amen.