

Epiphany V

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[0 : 00] Amen. Here again a portion of this morning's gospel. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field?

How then does it have tares? And the owner answered, An enemy has done this. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dearly beloved, Have you ever felt pain? Have you ever experienced heartache?

Have you ever suffered a great, great loss? What if I told you I knew exactly why you felt that pain? And why you experienced that heartache? And precisely why you suffered that horrible, horrible loss? Do you think the answer would bring you any comfort?

[1 : 06] Do you think knowing why you are suffering, why you feel pain, or why you are dying, would make things any better? Several years ago, when I was serving as a Lutheran pastor in Iowa, a parishioner asked me to visit his brother who was dying of AIDS at a nearby hospital.

And before I met with that young man, I remember wondering what I would say to him if he asked, why me? And how telling him all the things which he already knew, things like how he had contracted AIDS because he slept with a lot of different people and shared a lot of different needles and lived what he himself later told me was a pretty rough life.

Well, telling him any of those things probably wasn't the answer. And even if he didn't do any of those things, which both he and his brother told me that he did, even if instead of a 29-year-old man, he was some 10-year-old boy who contracted AIDS through some botched blood transfusion, that answer still would not provide any comfort to him or his family because having the right answer to a specific question isn't always the solution.

Yes, you can provide an answer for why bad things happen to good people. You can tell them the world's not fair. Or that they live in a fallen world.

Or that they were the target of Satan. Or maybe, just maybe, they weren't as good as they actually thought. But none of those answers are helpful.

[3 : 07] None of those answers provide anyone who is truly suffering with comfort. So what does? And the answer is patience, hope, and faith in Christ, the Lord of the harvest.

For in this morning's gospel, our Lord tells us the parable of the wheat and the tares. And when the servants go to the owner of the field and say, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field?

How then does it have tares or weeds? The owner's response, that an enemy has done this, provides little comfort.

Just as it provides little comfort whenever we tell someone who is suffering that the reason they suffer is because they live in a fallen world or because they have sinned or because of the devil, that great enemy has done this.

And so just like whenever we are confronted with a great tragedy, the servants also frantically search for more answers. Master, they tell the owner of the field, the creator of heaven and earth, would you then like for us to go and gather the tares and uproot them from the ground?

[4 : 32] No, the owner responds, lest while gathering up the tares, you also uproot the wheat along with them. So let both grow together until the harvest.

And at the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, first, gather together the tares and bind them up in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.

In other words, dear servants of Christ, be patient, have hope, and trust in the creator of heaven and earth's plan for his field, for you, for me, and for all.

For that is ultimately where our comfort may be found. For our knowledge of why the world is the way it is, is not, it is not what provides anyone with comfort.

Yes, it might provide us with some answers, but certainly not comfort. Comfort comes only to the person who endures his suffering with patience, who trusts in the heavenly master's plan for his field, and who has hope in the final harvest that is to come, that day when the wheat and the tares will finally be separated and the righteous will inherit the earth, at the return of Christ on the last day, at the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

[6 : 12] But until that happy day comes, what are we to do? Well, first, I think we need to recognize that we don't have all the answers, and that even if we did, it's not like any of those answers would provide anyone who is suffering with comfort.

And second, I think we also need to recognize that when a tragedy strikes, we are to be patient and to stand alongside the wheat and the tares of the field in their pain and bear one another's burdens and the hope and love of God, taking up our cross daily and faithfully following Christ our Lord and God of all comfort.

for only He knows, only He knows what is wheat and what is tares, what will be gathered into His barn and what will not.

After all, our job as Christians is not to have all the answers, but it is to be patient, to have hope, and to remain faithful unto Christ.

Therefore, our Lord tells us, come to me, all of you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[7 : 53] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find comfort for your souls.

For God loves you, He is with you, so be patient, have hope, trust in Him, and encourage one another to do the same.

For here ends the parable of the wheat and the tares, and how we are supposed to live life together in the field of our God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Amen.