Proper 11A 2020 Why all prayers are not granted?

Isaiah 44: 6 – 8

Romans 8: 18 – 27

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Hymn of the Day 772 (LSB)

One of the great privileges of being Christian, is the opportunity to ask our heavenly Father anything. Truly there is no request that is too small for He cares so much about us that He hears every prayer. And there is no request that is too large for His mercy is more than we can imagine. We could never out-ask Him anything.

That in itself should make us reflect on our own prayer life. How could it be that we pass on a prayer request thinking that it is not important enough! Such false humility does not come from faith.

Then what about the times we are afraid to ask Him because it is too large? The tiniest faith of a mustard seed can move large mountains and have them thrown into the sea. Is there anything our heavenly Father cannot do?

So that brings us to the prayer from our Gospel reading. Servants asked their master to gather up the weeds from his garden to be burned. It seems like a legitimate request. Who doesn’t want to get rid of weeds in their gardens?

It shows zeal for the Master’s garden to want to get rid of the weeds. After all, the weeds are the sons of the devil sown by him and belonging to him. It seems like a good work to pull them up for the fire. Good must triumph over evil. Onward Christian soldiers! With the Lord begin your task!

But wait! Hold on! The master says NO! He does not grant them their request. Now that is a shocker. Why wouldn’t God want to get rid of evil? Why would He refuse the volunteers that want to work for him and pull up weeds?

The master answers that by telling us we don’t know the difference between weeds and the good wheat. While it may be true at first that there are weeds that look a lot like good wheat but everyone knows the difference come harvest time. You cannot make bread out of weeds. The difference lies in the harvest. Only good seeds produce good fruit. And that is for all to see.

So God does has not called us to be harvesters. The ones who will gather the evil people for the fire are angels not us. So that is reasonable. Each one of us has work to do. We cannot do the work of another if God has not called us thereto. Jesus is the One who returns to judge the living and the dead on the Final Day and He sends his angels to separate the wheat from chaff, the good children of the kingdom from unbelievers who are headed for eternal fire.

But there is so much more to this prayer request being denied.

Does God want his children to live in frustration with all the evil around them? Why can’t He do something now? He certainly acted in swift judgment during the Flood, upon Sodom and Gomorrah and when He sent the plagues upon Egypt. Surely the days are more evil now. There is plenty of rotten fruit for the incinerator.

God is truly patient and merciful. More than we are. He waits for those who will be called according to His purpose to save. Many unbelievers now will hear of Jesus and be forgiven and be saved. That is something we cannot see or know. The future belongs to God alone who knows the future as well as the past.

In the writings of Isaiah God says: *I am the first and the last; besides me there is no god*. He waits for those who will hear of his mighty works of salvation and believe in the future. As He saved Israel from Egyptian slavery by mighty wonders so He saved the world by the death of His Son to give life to all.

Where would we be without the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus? Without God’s mighty act of declaring us innocent for the sake of Jesus, we would be weeds, getting in the way of God’s good seeds and be worthy of burning; rightly earning God’s judgment because of all our sins.

God’s patience and desire to save all should make us a little less ready to rush in and start burning weeds now, it explains why not all of our prayer requests are granted. St. Paul asked three times for the thorn in his flesh to be removed and God said no. Christian addicts struggle daily with their addictions, pleading for help. Christians are frustrated with increasing evil in the world and ask their heavenly father to do something about it and God says no, not yet.

When Jesus comes on the Last Day in Final Judgment, it will be too late for anyone to believe in Him. In asking God to bring judgment upon evil, it is a request for the time of faith to come to an end. God’s knows his children who are yet to be brought into His kingdom of mercy. We do not.

But God wants us to live by faith not sight, nor vengeance, nor getting pleasure from the suffering of our enemies. By faith in Christ, we sinners become God’s children and our sins are overlooked. By the same faith in Christ, we put up with the evil around, overlooking it in the hopes that God might call some to repentance and faith.

God’s law still accuses all lawlessness and that is necessary now to lead us all to confess our sins, but God’s patient mercy waits for the final judgment when his grace no longer turns sons of the devil into sons of His everlasting kingdom of glory.

While we may want to end our suffering and frustration, God has the higher purpose of calling more to faith and strengthening our own faith, in mind.

This explains why not all of our prayer requests are granted. Since God’s greatest act of salvation is accomplished in the death and rising of His Son, we are bold to pray to him and ask him anything, but leave all outcomes in His tender, nail-scarred hands, knowing that He knows best.