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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

MAY 6, 2007

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR FRY: It's great being with you today. I
2 just got a new shirt and I'm showing it off today.

3 I was in Portland, Oregon, this past week. My son
4 called me a little over a week ago and shared with tremendous
5 enthusiasm that he was chosen as the lead performer in a
6 ballet.

7 He dances for the Oregon Ballet Theatre in Portland,
8 and it's a once in a lifetime opportunity, and I said I'm not
9 going to miss it, when are you doing it, and he said I'm not
10 really sure.

11 They don't really find out until a day or so in
12 advance.

13 So I flew out to be there for Wednesday, Thursday
14 and Friday's show with the hope that he would be in one of
15 those, and he was the lead Thursday night and it was just
16 spectacular.

17 If you know ballet at all, it's George Balanchine's
18 "Apollo" which is arguably the most physically demanding role
19 that a man can have and he's like carrying this girl around
20 on his neck and stuff.

21 It's just fantastic. It was so cool. My mom and my
22 sister and mom's step-daughter were all there as well.

23 We met up at Portland. Wenda wasn't able to go, she
24 had to work, and actually she's away this week. She's taking
25 her training in Washington, D.C.

1 So we are really the jet setters, aren't we? We are
2 kind of all over the place.

3 So I got my new shirt on. I got it at the Nike
4 Warehouse and I thought I would wear it today, it's kind of
5 casual Sunday, and I know I'm kind of overdressed, but I
6 thought I would show it off.

7 So maybe I will really get cooking here and I will
8 take my coat off in a little while.

9 Anyway, grab a Bible, we are going to look at a fun
10 story from Matthew 13.

11 We have been in a worship series talking about this
12 spring planting.

13 Some of us haven't done our planting yet. Some of
14 you may have been planning to do it today and now the rain is
15 going to postpone that a little bit.

16 And there are some of those ways that God teaches
17 us, too, about this whole timing issue that is really
18 interesting.

19 But we're having some fun with this. We are going
20 to be looking at different parables each week.

21 I'm going to be diving right in today with a parable
22 from Matthew 13.

23 So we love it when you bring your own Bible, and we
24 like you to use ours as well.

25 So Matthew 13, beginning at Verse 24, and I'm going

1 to go ahead and read that section and then I'm going to
2 rewind and then fast forward a little bit.

3 In my Bible it's on page 13 and it begins with,
4 "He," that means Jesus, "put before them another parable."

5 He has just told them the parable of the sower, and
6 that's the one that Wenda preached on last week about the guy
7 who scatters the seed just all over the place, and some of it
8 is on the rocks, and some of it is on the path, some of it is
9 in the good soil, and there's thorns and all kind of drama,
10 that some of stuff will be eaten by birds and stuff.

11 So he has just told that parable and then he
12 explained it, and then we jump in at Verse 24.

13 "He put before them another parable. The kingdom of
14 heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his
15 field.

16 "But while everybody was asleep an enemy came and
17 sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away, so when the
18 plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as
19 well.

20 "And the slaves of the householder came and said to
21 him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where
22 then did these weeds come from?"

23 He answered, "An enemy has done this."

24 The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go
25 and to gather them?"

1 But he replied, "No, for in gathering the weeds you
2 would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them
3 grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will
4 tell the reapers collect the weeds first and bind them in
5 bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

6 This is the Gospel of the Lord that we are going to
7 come zooming in on, but I want to show you the overview of
8 this 13th Chapter.

9 I mentioned to you that in Verses 1 through 23 Jesus
10 has taught this parable, as well as explained it, about the
11 sower.

12 He has done that, and then in 24 to 30, the ones we
13 just looked at, that's the parable of the weeds.

14 What Jesus does then right away is really kind of
15 interesting.

16 They are just done with that and then he put before
17 them another parable. He talks about the mustard seed.

18 And he put another one forward and he talks about
19 this yeast, it's like a little bit of leaven in the loaf.

20 So those two are kind of tucked in there, and then
21 it's almost like some comedians, when they tell a joke,
22 people don't laugh right away but they get it later.

23 That's kind of the way it is with this parable of
24 the weeds.

25 Jesus tells this parable and then he goes right into

1 this mustard thing, and then the yeast thing.

2 And then the disciples have him off by themselves
3 and they are like, what is the deal with the weeds?

4 It's a troubling parable, so he explains it. This
5 is the only time in the scriptures he doesn't explain it
6 right away.

7 He waits a little bit, after the mustard seed and
8 the yeast, and then he explains the parable we just looked
9 at.

10 He says here is the deal, the enemy is the devil,
11 and the angels will come, they will do the harvesting in the
12 end. He explains it to them.

13 Then he does a couple other parables, this hidden
14 treasure, it's like a guy who finds this wonderful treasure
15 out in his field, and then there is this pearl that is very
16 expensive, and then this parable of the net.

17 So Jesus is, as they say on ESPN, he's on a roll.
18 He's butter. He's on a roll.

19 He's doing parables. He's cranking them out really
20 quickly here.

21 So I throw that out because we need to understand
22 that we need to do some thing with this planting that he's
23 done and that he encourages us to do.

24 And Pastor Wenda last week invited us to not think
25 like American farmers.

1 We must erase images of American farming, and I grew
2 up with a grandfather that was in town and another
3 grandfather that lived out on a farm.

4 Some of my best memories were on grandpa's farm. I
5 loved it. I just loved to go there.

6 He had one of those farms that had a little bit of
7 everything.

8 He chickens, he had pigs, cows, he had corn, he had
9 some beans.

10 And I just loved to go there and fiddle around as a
11 kid would in the barn. Just fantastic.

12 Some of my best memories are out on the American
13 farm in Iowa. I loved it.

14 But we need to erase some of those memories, because
15 as we looked at that parable of the sower last week, it took
16 place two thousand years ago, and they didn't have the
17 agricultural practicing that we have, and in some ways our
18 own concept of farming limits our understanding of Jesus'
19 parable.

20 For example, last week about the sowing of the seed,
21 the seed just went everywhere.

22 There's no neat rows to the thing. The soil in the
23 Middle East is not like it is in northeast Iowa.

24 It has rocks, it has paths, it has brambles and
25 stuff in it.

1 So the sower, there is this tremendous extravagance
2 and waste.

3 They are putting so much seed out and there's really
4 kind of a I don't know how much we are going to get back kind
5 of a notion of that, and some farmers know that, too.

6 There are sometimes farmers don't even get their
7 seed back.

8 I know that, but we need to erase some of those
9 images of American farming.

10 I flew in yesterday from the west coast and we were
11 flying in and it was kind of turbulent over the Rockies.
12 This whole weather system was coming through.

13 But when we got up over Nebraska you could see down
14 and there's neatness to everything.

15 Everything is on a grid, and you could see the
16 wonderful terracing farming that a lot of our brothers and
17 sisters are doing, but that's not the Middle East; that's
18 here.

19 The Bible doesn't have that kind of an overview.
20 It's more like everywhere.

21 The same is true with this weeds parable, and yet
22 there are some similarities that we bring in the 21st
23 Century, too.

24 So we are going to dive into that, but I want you to
25 see that.

1 We need to erase some of that, and it's interesting
2 because Jesus often talks about barns, irrigation, and stuff
3 like that, but we bring our own image of a barn, like the red
4 one we had as a kid.

5 No, that's not what he's talking about when at the
6 end of this parable he says there are things that are going
7 to be put in my barn.

8 He's talking about heaven, and it's not going to be
9 like the barn on my grandpa's farm; it's going to be this
10 beautiful mansion kind of thing.

11 Jesus knows us so well, because he drops this
12 parable on them from Verses 24 to 30.

13 And then he throws another one out about the mustard
14 seed, and another one, and then we go back to Verse 36.

15 "Then he left the crowds and he went into the
16 house."

17 The teaching he does is to the crowds. It's to
18 everybody.

19 But what the disciples are concerned about, they get
20 back in the house and they're like we know you teach this way
21 to everybody, but we really don't get it either, so would you
22 tell us a little bit more about the weeds parable, and what
23 he does then is he unpacks it.

24 Verse 36, "Then he left the crowds and went into the
25 house and his disciples approached him saying, "Explain to us

1 the parable of the weeds of the field."

2 Jesus answers them, "The one who sows the good seed
3 is the Son of Man, the field is the world, and the good seed
4 are the children of the kingdom, the weeds are the children
5 of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil."

6 But here is the point I want to make on it. We
7 don't even have to go to that to understand that what is kind
8 of bothering the disciples is this notion that they don't get
9 to do the weeding.

10 That's just inborn I think in anybody that is in an
11 organization, or in a group, is that we look around and we
12 like to think that we know who the weeds are.

13 So we need to be careful of that. Our tendency to
14 judge others is not our best quality.

15 That's what they are doing. They're like I thought
16 you planted good seed.

17 Yes, I did.

18 Then what is the deal with this weed over here?

19 It's like have they met the entrance requirements of
20 being wheat?

21 I've seen them outside this barn and they look like
22 weeds to me.

23 In fact, they are kind of weedy, and they are kind
24 of seedy, and our tendency is to get the weed whacker out,
25 and get the Scott's out, and get the big spray stuff out, and

1 take care of the weeds around us, spray them with a
2 flamethrower almost, because we judge.

3 But, see, what Jesus is talking about is that's not
4 your job.

5 You're not supposed to be weeders; you are supposed
6 to be lovers and leaders. So he knows that about us.

7 I love that. That's my favorite part of gardening.
8 Wenda does the gardening around our house. I don't do it.

9 I mow the lawn sporadically, as you can tell by
10 going by our yard right now.

11 But when I do the weed whacking stuff around the
12 edge I usually get some stuff I'm not supposed to get, and
13 I'll cut off a branch of something, or a little twig of
14 something, and usually I think it's going to go unnoticed.

15 And the next day Wenda will go, "Why did you whack
16 off the end of that philodendron?"

17 A philo what? A Philadelphia? I don't know what a
18 philodendron is. It looked like a weed to me.

19 And I don't know what those things are, I think they
20 are peonies, that have all the ants that cross-pollinate them
21 and stuff.

22 I love mowing over those things in the fall. Wenda
23 goes, "You don't mow over those."

24 But that's the way I garden. I'm an aggressive
25 gardener, because I'm a lousy gardener.

1 But, you see, the point being our tendency is to
2 think we can tell who the weeds are, and especially clergy
3 think this way, and especially Christians.

4 I spent the week in Portland. It was awesome.
5 Every morning I get up early, and on the west coast my body
6 was really messed up.

7 But I would get up, and my son lives in a house with
8 five other guys, they are all bachelors, and they have no
9 orange juice and they have no coffee in the house.

10 So I have to go down to street to a place called
11 Genie's.

12 They call it the best coffee shop in Portland. It's
13 awesome, just a little neighborhood place.

14 But they don't start serving coffee until 7:00 and
15 they don't serve breakfast until 8:00.

16 So I get up and I take all my devotional stuff down
17 and I go down to Genie's and I walk down there and put my
18 stuff up on the counter.

19 It's really good for me to travel, because people in
20 Portland look totally different than they do in Omaha.

21 And this waitress, a lovely woman, her name was
22 Violet, she had spikes in her face, and she had blue hair,
23 and she had tattoos all over her arm and leg, but she was the
24 nicest person.

25 And if you would have asked me when I went in there

1 on Wednesday morning I would have thought she was a weed, and
2 I would have liked to have gotten a weed whacker out.

3 Spent about three days there, Wednesday, Thursday,
4 Friday morning I got up early and went down and each day
5 Violet would say, "Oh, you're back."

6 "Yes, just kind of hanging here waiting for my son.
7 He gets up about 8:00. You probably know him. He's the guy
8 who comes in and gets the coconut granola with currants in
9 it."

10 It's a real tree hugger type place. Portland is
11 that way, and I'm kind of a bacon and eggs guy from the farm.
12 I mean, these people, they just look different.

13 So a couple days into it I'm sitting there doing my
14 devotions and stuff.

15 What I do when I travel is I photocopy off all my
16 pages so I don't have to bring all these devotional books.

17 What I found myself doing is leaving those there. I
18 thought maybe Violet, the flower, Violet, will pick this up.

19 I don't know, but she thought I was pretty weird to
20 be sitting in their doing this Bible study while I'm reading
21 the Oregonian newspaper.

22 But each day, it was interesting, because we got a
23 little closer each day emotionally.

24 Then she asks, "Are you coming in tomorrow?"

25 I said, "No, I have to catch a flight Saturday

1 morning at 6:00."

2 "Oh, that's early."

3 "Yes, I'm thinking about getting a cab. What do you
4 think about that?"

5 "Yes, they are pretty good. A lot of my friends get
6 cabs, usually not to the airport, but to get a cab home, you
7 know, they made bad decisions the night before."

8 "Yeah, I know about that too."

9 My point being, it would have been real easy for me
10 to think she was a weed and either want to eradicate her or
11 eliminate her or invalidate her.

12 That's what disciples tend to do. Do you want me to
13 go out and get a weed whacker out?

14 No. That's my job.

15 So it's an interesting parable on many different
16 levels. Here is what the deal is.

17 If Jesus is talking, and I believe he is, about this
18 tendency to judge, and he's talking about weeds and wheat,
19 and it's good seed, and I believe that as a child of the
20 Father I have good seed, and you are, too, I know that about
21 you, you are the wheat, not the weed.

22 What does wheat do? Well, it grows. It matures.
23 Wenda is from Montana and she loves to go out in Montana and
24 watch the wheat fields dancing in the wind.

25 So if there are these two categories of wheat and

1 weed, we need to think, well, now, my job description then as
2 wheat is what?

3 I need to mature.

4 And what does wheat need to mature?

5 Wheat matures with light, with moisture, with wind,
6 with nutrients.

7 It's harvested for a greater purpose. We are the
8 bread basket of the world here in the midwest.

9 The same is true of us Christians. We are supposed
10 to feed the world, Projects like Habitat for Humanity,
11 through world hunger, we are the wheat of the world.

12 We are the good seed, but we are not supposed to
13 start comparing wheat and weeds.

14 We are supposed to tend to our own business as
15 wheat, and what do they do?

16 Well, they grow. They mature with light, moisture,
17 wind, and nutrients.

18 It's a real fine line, isn't it, because some wheat
19 that I know just sits.

20 They don't really have a concept of the light or the
21 wind. They just kind of vegetate.

22 But notice he doesn't say cucumbers; he says wheat,
23 and what wheat does is it stands tall.

24 So stand tall, wheat, you are God's good seed. Let
25 the wind lead you and teach you to dance in the light of the

1 spirit.

2 My son's dancing is amazing to me, and that's a
3 brutal profession that is so visual.

4 There are a lot of people who just get rejected and
5 demeaned and he was telling about the eating disorders just
6 among his professional group.

7 And he was told to lose a few pounds and I saw him a
8 month or two ago and he didn't need to lose any weight.

9 But the director said you need to lose three or four
10 pounds.

11 He did, but he didn't do it by an unhealthy way. He
12 he's working in the studio eight hours a day.

13 That's why he has coconut granola with the currants,
14 instead of having potatoes and eggs.

15 You should see the guy. I played professional
16 basketball. I wasn't in half the shape my son is in.

17 He's maturing, and he's just standing tall, and he's
18 dancing. That's what we need to do as wheat.

19 There is an interesting quote, and I don't have an
20 author for it, but it was talking about lighthouses and here
21 is the quote.

22 "Sounding out bad news is for foghorns, not
23 Christians."

24 I know a lot of doom and gloom people, you weeds
25 better get your life together, the threshing floor is coming.

1 They think they are John the Baptist in that way.
2 You better watch it because you're going to get burned.

3 But this is an interesting quote. "Sounding out bad
4 news is for foghorns, not Christians. The foghorn warns
5 nearby vessels to steer clear as there are dangerous rocks
6 and reefs and perilous cliffs hiding in the mist. Foghorns
7 know that they are doing their job when everybody stays
8 away."

9 That's what some churches do a really good job of
10 doing, keeping people away.

11 You're all going to hell. That's foghorn. You're
12 going to hell. I'm sorry. It's right in the text.

13 I've got some good news for you today and some bad
14 news.

15 The good news is, Jesus is; the bad news is, you're
16 not on his team, because your life is not good enough. You
17 are a weed. That's a foghorn. Get your act together.

18 Christians are sometimes called to sound warnings,
19 don't get me wrong, that is true, and to serve as foghorns,
20 there is a harvest coming, but it's not Jesus is coming, you
21 better look busy. It's different than that.

22 Our primary assignment is not warning, but welcome.
23 We need to welcome the Violets of the world into our homes,
24 and into our lives.

25 The cook in the back, he's one of these guys, I

1 don't know what they call that phenomenon where they go to a
2 tattoo guy and they separate your scalp and they put plates
3 in there and then your skin grows over it and it makes these
4 little bumps on your dome.

5 It's really kind of an amazing art form, but the guy
6 has that and he's kind of like -- it's just to get a
7 reaction.

8 He comes around the corner and he goes, "How are you
9 doing today?"

10 I go, "Pretty good. What is your name?"

11 "Well, my friends call me Ice."

12 "That's cool. Nice to meet you, Ice. I'm Mark."

13 "What are you doing down here?"

14 "My son lives down the street. I'm here for a few
15 days. He's a dancer."

16 "Oh, yeah, the guy that gets coconut granola, yes."

17 But, you see, that's wheat, and wheat stuff, and I'm
18 not going to say what is up with your hair style? He was
19 welcoming me into his restaurant.

20 Why don't we do that better as a church people?
21 Bring people into our very homes.

22 It's table fellowship, isn't it. If you take the
23 meals and the mountains out of the Bible it's about fifty
24 pages long, Mike likes to say.

25 It's eating with people that look different than us.

1 It's eating with people that may be from different fields,
2 welcoming them.

3 The farmer in this parable wisely decides that it's
4 better to leave the weeds growing along with the wheat until
5 the harvest time, rather than disturb the tender roots of the
6 growing wheat stalks.

7 Separation of the weeds and the wheat waits until
8 the harvest time.

9 It was interesting, Tracy said something about
10 Lutherans and Baptists.

11 Isn't that funny, that we get this whole, well, you
12 are not really wheat, you're partially wheat because you are
13 a different denomination, or whatever that is.

14 Jesus doesn't make that distinction, does he? He
15 just says that's my job to separate out.

16 We are all one. In the Father's house, the Father's
17 field, the end result will be the barn or the burn.

18 The barn or the burn.

19 We think we know weeds when we see them, don't we?
20 I was talking about my propensity for the weed whacker and
21 the Scott's and all that.

22 I have an interesting quote here. I don't know
23 where it comes from either.

24 "In nature the distinction between what is a weed
25 and what is useful and a valuable plant is less clear than

1 you might think.

2 "A dandelion growing in your yard is a weed.
3 However, a dandelion growing in your garden is a delicate
4 flavorful green.

5 "Ivy scaling your brick chimney might threaten the
6 stability of the mortar, but ivy carefully trained up along a
7 trellis will add beauty and value to your home.

8 "Fungus and lichens are just mushy, mossy
9 undergrowth, but as they are necessary for the soil for the
10 rare and delicate Calypso orchid, they are a rich growing
11 medium.

12 "In nature you can never quite tell what might issue
13 from a weed. The same is true in the garden of humanity as
14 well."

15 Some of the great stories of history are people who
16 have been given a second chance, and they weren't weeds like
17 their peers thought they were at all. They were wheat that
18 God would use to feed the world.

19 And that's what I want to think about my new friends
20 in Portland. They're feeding me. At the very least what I
21 should do is be hospitable to them when they are welcoming me
22 into their place.

23 I think that's true of our homes as well. We
24 welcome in people.

25 We love them, unconditionally, not with well, get a

1 haircut, straighten up your life.

2 God will take care of that stuff. We catch the
3 fish; he cleans them.

4 That's why Jesus goes right into that story of the
5 net a little bit later. Jesus is so wonderful in his
6 teaching.

7 The parable of the wheat and the weeds as told by
8 Jesus makes this farmer's patience and grace the focus of the
9 text.

10 Isn't it amazing? As I said, we need to divorce
11 ourselves from some of those farming mentalities we've got.

12 It's amazing to me that Jesus is like, no, don't
13 worry about it.

14 He's so concerned about one tiny little kernel of
15 wheat, it could be infested with weeds, and he doesn't want
16 us to go in there with a flamethrower.

17 My favorite tool of my dad's was that thing where
18 you dig up dandelions, that little sharp thing on the end. I
19 don't think they make them anymore. Those were awesome.

20 You dig down and dig out the roots and flop them
21 over in the yard and the next day they are just laying there
22 like you really have a sense of closure, you have really done
23 some great harvesting and stuff.

24 If you live in California, all I was doing was that,
25 that's all what we had, was dandelions. I'm digging those

1 things up, flipping them over, squirting water on everything,
2 and it was just crab grass, but it looked green.

3 But, see, that's the point. Jesus is so concerned
4 for just that one wheat kernel that is there, he doesn't want
5 us to go in there with our big thumb like hands and wreck the
6 thing.

7 I close with a quote and then with a prayer. This
8 is a quote by Theresa of Avila. She was a wonderful mystic.

9 She says, "Untilled soil, however fertile it may be,
10 will bear thistles and thorns, and so it is with a man's mind
11 and soul."

12 Jesus is interesting because he talks about how we
13 he need to sow, and we need to be soil, and we need to be
14 wheat.

15 But he is also fully aware that a lot of people will
16 get so passive that they won't seek the light, or the wind,
17 or the water.

18 What is going to happen then is that thistles and
19 thorns will start to grow in our garden.

20 That's why it's so important. We talk about
21 balance. It's the up, the in, and the out.

22 It's going to the Father for all good things, and if
23 we cut and short-circuit that, the thorns and the thistles
24 are going to take over, and the enemy, that's who he is, it's
25 the way he rolls, he'll not just put them out there in the

1 coffee shops and all the different restaurants, he'll put
2 them right in here.

3 He'll come and he'll attack in the night time. He
4 has those two fascinating weapons of shame of the past and
5 fear of the future.

6 And if we aren't staying close to the Father, and
7 wondering and harmoniously thinking about how great it is to
8 be in that barn, we are going to get that unholy heartburn
9 that comes.

10 So I don't know what you need weeded in your life,
11 but I want to pray.

12 Keep being creative with those parable stories of
13 what you're doing with those random gifts that we gave out.

14 That's pretty cool stuff, too. It's amazing, isn't
15 it, it keeps coming back to the fact of God's grace and God's
16 patience with us.

17 There is a plant Wenda plants call impatiens, you
18 may know what they are, but that's neat.

19 But I'm not a weed, just impatient sometimes, so
20 let's pray.

21 I'm going to take a stab and think there are some
22 people that need to do a little bit of gardening.

23 And I think maybe it's God's way of saying you're
24 not going to do the outside gardening today, maybe you need
25 to look inside.

1 Your garden is a little muddy at home now, so you're
2 not going to be able to go out like you thought you would, so
3 maybe today is the day to work on your up, or your in, or
4 your out, change of plans. Let's pray for a moment about
5 that.

6 Lord, it is so good to be here. There's a lot of
7 places we could be, but you're here and we thank you for that
8 beautiful baptism of our new little brother Brand.

9 He has been branded with the cross of Jesus now,
10 Lord, and so have we.

11 We're your seed and we want to grow, we want to be
12 wheat and not weedy.

13 So, Lord, continue to shower your grace on us in the
14 form of rain and light and wind.

15 And, Lord, forgive us our impatience and that part
16 of us that wants to get out the weed whacker and just mow
17 through this life.

18 Instead give us patience, Lord, and today as my
19 friends go would you give them some time that they might seek
20 you and be at the table with their family and friends and
21 then extend that table to friends like Ice, and Violet, and
22 whoever else you have for us.

23 Lord, we pray all this in the name of the gardener.

24 Amen.

25