

Sunday 19th July

Reading: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of the Weeds

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ One night, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, then the weeds showed up. ²⁷ The man's servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ ‘It was some enemy who did this,’ he answered. ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ they asked him. ²⁹ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.’”

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

³⁶ When Jesus had left the crowd and gone indoors, his disciples came to him and said, “Tell us what the parable about the weeds in the field means.”

³⁷ Jesus answered, “The man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world; the good seed is the people who belong to the Kingdom; the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed the weeds is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvest workers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered up and burned in the fire, so the same thing will happen at the end of the age: ⁴¹ the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather up out of his Kingdom all those who cause people to sin and all others who do evil things, ⁴² and they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and gnash their teeth. ⁴³ [a] Then God's people will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Listen, then, if you have ears!



I am what you would probably call a fair weather gardener. I like nothing more than to potter in the garden on a sunny day. However, if the sunny days are few and far between then my poor garden gets sadly neglected. This year however, because of lockdown, I found myself spending a lot more time pottering outside. I rearranged flower beds and created tidier paths. I then discovered old seed packets lurking in the shed some of which were several years old. However, nothing ventured, so I created beds of seemingly weed free soil and sowed them. However, it wasn't just the seeds that came up, as a miscellany of different looking shoots popped out of the earth and all started to grow. It is going to be some time before I can identify the plants I intended to grow there and am able to remove the unwanted seedlings.

Jesus' parable this morning is one I can relate to perfectly! I understand the annoyance of planting one thing, only to discover a lot of other things growing at the same time. Those listening to Jesus would also be able to picture the scene He is describing. It is a simple story of plant management and how to ensure that your main crop, in this case wheat, grows and is harvested in the most efficient manner. The weeds that Jesus mentions were probably dandelion, which is common in wheat fields. It looks similar to wheat until the seed heads form. However, it has deeper roots than wheat; consequently, pulling it up at an early stage risks pulling up the wheat with it. Later, when the grain appears and both are easily identifiable it will be a simple task to separate the two crops, placing one safely in the barn, and using the other as fuel for a fire.

So, as I said, a simple story. But, of course, we know by now that every story Jesus tells has a deeper meaning. Jesus makes it easy for the listeners this time, and tells them what it is about: 'The kingdom of heaven is like this.' He says. He goes on later to explain the meaning to his disciples when they ask Him, and God's final answer to the problem makes for uncomfortable reading.

The field is the world, which contains people of the Kingdom, and people of the Evil one. God is the farmer, and He lets them grow together, until He finally sends out His angels to act as harvest gatherers who will separate the two. Those who do evil things, or cause

others to sin will be thrown on the fire. The people of God will 'shine like stars in the Father's Kingdom. Listen then if you have ears.' As I said, uncomfortable reading. No grey areas here, very much only black and white.

In a world where there is so much sin, suffering and evil the cry often goes up 'Why doesn't God DO something.' This parable gives us some insight into the answer, although I don't think in this life we will ever understand the message completely. It is also a parable about waiting and trusting.

The servants have planted the seeds as per the instructions of their master. They are devastated to see the weeds growing up amongst the wheat. First they check with their master that they were using good quality seeds, and when assured that they were, they then question where the weeds have come from. The master tells them it was someone working against him, someone who didn't want to see his crop flourish, someone who wanted to destroy it. The servants then want to do something about the situation immediately. They want to go back out to the fields and pull up the weeds, but are told to wait and let the two grow alongside each other, until they are ready to be harvested, at which point they will be separated.

Isn't it interesting that it is the servants who want to uproot the weeds? They have never owned anything themselves, but they are sure that if they did they could not stand to have it contaminated by weeds. They would be prepared to put in any amount of back-breaking labour to uproot the weeds, even if it did mean damaging some of the crops at the same time. They are anxious, indignant, perhaps even a little fearful that the master will blame them for what has happened. In other words, they are acting like the servants they are.

But the master's attitude is very different. The master's main concern is to preserve the crop. Separating out good and bad growth can more safely be done when the crop is fully grown. It's not that he doesn't mind about the weeds, or that he has any intention of pretending that they are anything else; it's just that he can take the long-term view, whilst the servants can only worry. They are used to small, everyday tasks, with immediate results; they are not used to large, long-term responsibilities.

Jesus explains that the parable tells that the good and wonderful signs of the kingdom of heaven, here on earth, often exist alongside negative and much darker aspects. While we remain here on earth we live in a very mixed economy. We see wars, conflicts, corruption and evil in the world. We also experience it on a more personal level in our own lives. Are there people we find difficult to live alongside? Are there colleagues in our workplace, neighbours next door, that make life hard for us because they know we are Christian? Do we often demand that God does something about it - NOW? Do we think we should intervene and try and solve the issues ourselves? It can be easy to only see 'weeds' and overlook the 'wheat' around us. But the parable speaks of them both

growing together. The wheat still bears grain even with the weeds surrounding it. In this troubled world, where we see good and evil seemingly side by side, do you look for signs of God's kingdom, or concentrate on symptoms of evil?

I said before, at the heart of the parable is the note of patience - not just the patience of the servants who have to wait and watch, but the patience of God himself. God didn't and doesn't enjoy the sight of a cornfield with weeds all over the place. But nor does he relish the thought of declaring harvest time too soon, and destroying wheat along with weeds.

I pray continually for people I know and love to come to faith, and I am sure you do too. This leaves me in a bit of tension, for I long for God to deal dramatically and instantly with the 'weeds' and evil in the world, but I don't want Him to do that until those I love have become part of the good crop themselves.

Why doesn't God DO something, we cry.

However, we need to remember that we live in the time after Calvary and Easter, and we know that God did indeed do something, suddenly and dramatically at that moment. When today we long for God to act, to put the world to rights, we must remind ourselves that He has already done so, and that what we are waiting for now is the full outworking of those events that occurred on Good Friday and Easter Day.

We are not servants but are children of God and as such should not panic and try and create a weed-free field, whatever the cost. We know God, our Father, is a God of justice and love, and we should trust His strategies more than our own. We seek answers now, He knows His long term vision.

God is in control. The time will come when He will gather in the harvest. Wait with patience, not like people in a dark room wondering if anyone will ever come with a lighted candle, but like people in early morning who know that the sun has arisen and are now waiting for the full brightness of midday.

Stand proud in your wheat field, put down deep roots in God's word so the weeds cannot smother you. Show God's love to all around you. Pray. Be a Kingdom builder here and now. Then be patient, Child of God. The harvest will come, but for the sake of our loved ones who still need to know God, I pray, not yet.

Amen

Music:

Build your kingdom here - Rend Collective

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8awpRHg5waw&list=RD8awpRHg5waw&start_radio=1

Prayer: *(from Life and Work, July)*

Eternal God,

In this strangest of years,
As we have watched winter bloom to spring, unfold to summer
From behind our windows and doors,
Speak to us, God of promise and hope,
That in Your shaping hands,
You hold all time:
The quick and slow,
The full and empty,
The wasted and well-spent.

Present God,

In this strangest of years,
As we have heard the voices of loved ones from afar,
And communicated with many,
But not face-to-face;
Speak to us God of promise and hope,
That with Your gentlest, calmest voice,
We may find Your reassurance
That in good time, we will meet again,
With those from whom we have been separate.

Understanding God,

In this strangest of years,
As we have seen our plans crumble, or go on hold,
And we have found it hard to focus,
And concentrate, and be resilient in our thinking,
Untangle our minds;
That we might piece together steadily
Our way ahead, one step, one day, one hour, one moment,
Beside our thoughtful God Whose paths
Already lie beneath our feet, prepared to lead us on.

Loving God,

In this strangest of years,
Take us by Your hand and with Your smile,
Forgive, encourage and set free each child of Yours,
Each Church, community and land,

That healed by grace, emboldened by Your love,
We may with daring faith,
Resolve our hearts to face the future,
Confident that our future, now as always,
Invites our discovery, and our trust in You.
Amen.