

Sermon for Sunday 23 July 2023

7th Sunday after Trinity

**Genesis 28: 10 – 19a; Romans 8: 12 – 25;
Matthew 13: 24 – 30, 36 – 43**

The Weeds and the Wheat

Why doesn't God just sort out all of the evil in the world? How can a God of love let such a tragedy happen?

I'm sure those are questions we've all wondered about at some point or other whether we're scanning the news or dealing with something much more personal in our lives. Well, today's story of the weeds and the wheat, gives us a bit of an explanation about this. And we hear it from Jesus Himself as He explains the meaning of the parable.

The story is about a rather dramatic case of agricultural sabotage. Someone has deliberately sown weeds in a field of wheat. When I'm gardening I find it often isn't possible to be quite sure when tiny green things pop out of the

ground whether they are going to grow up to be the flowers I wanted or the weeds I didn't want. So I generally leave them until I'm sure. It seems to be the same here. It's not until the field is well grown that the slaves see clearly what has happened. This kind of sabotage was clearly not unknown in the Ancient World, as there is a Roman law against the sowing of darnel in a wheat field as an act of revenge against an enemy. We don't know for sure what the weed is in this story, but darnel does come up looking exactly like wheat when it is young, but then it produces a black seed which hosts a fungus which is toxic to humans.

Jesus explains that it is he, the Son of Man, who sows the good seed. The field is the world and the good seed are the children of the kingdom of heaven. The weeds are children of the evil one, the Devil, who has sowed them, and the harvest represents the end of the age, the final judgement when all causes of sin and all evildoers will be rooted out and destroyed. In the story, when the slaves discover the weeds, they want to pull them up straight away, but the farmer is

afraid that in doing this they will also pull up some of the good seed by mistake. How often, when I'm gardening I find I've done just that! But the farmer isn't prepared to lose one single plant from the final harvest in this way, so the weeds have to be left to grow alongside the wheat for the time being.

It's not a bad explanation for the way the world is, is it? The good and the bad in close proximity. Sometimes so closely entwined with one another that it's impossible to separate them or to find a perfect solution. So that often when we are making decisions we find ourselves looking for the least bad option because there is no really good one.

We can't take these analogies too far – but imagine for a moment we are right down in an arable field looking across it at the level of the wheat and the weeds. Weeds take up space and light, air and water. They are often very invasive. If you are a stalk of wheat it may not be great having to survive in those conditions alongside the weeds. You might be smothered. At the very

least it may be very difficult to produce a crop of good grain.

Our passage from Romans this morning was written to encourage Christians who found themselves in difficult circumstances. They were living in times when persecution was a very real threat and being a Christian might well mean not being able to participate in some civic or social activities because they centred on the worship of the emperor, who was regarded as a god, or on other pagan gods. The apostle Paul writes to encourage them. And we can be encouraged too.

We are children of God, he says; not slaves, but co-heirs with Jesus. To be brothers or sisters of Jesus in this sense implies that we too will suffer, as Jesus did. But the suffering is not worth comparing with the glory to come. He compares it with the pain of childbirth, which, while considerable, (Paul was a man!) doesn't compare with the joy of bringing a new human being into the world. He looks forward to the great harvest at the end of time when everything will be restored – even Creation itself. Because the

natural world has also been subject to decay and death since human beings first disobeyed God. How much we now need that restoration in our times when we have destroyed so much!

Jesus has saved us from death by dying for us. His death and resurrection bring life and hope to the whole world. But we haven't got there yet; we are still waiting for the final harvest. When that happens there will be judgement, and all evil will be finally destroyed. But it is for God alone to judge who belongs in his kingdom and who does not. Meanwhile our task is not to lose hope; to keep on growing in God's field, so that the good seed produces the good fruit, the full ear of grain.

And when things around us are tough or just don't make sense we're to trust God, to stay patient, to keep on growing into the wheat that God longs to harvest. And let God in his infinite wisdom and mercy be in charge of separating the good from the evil so that all that is evil is completely destroyed. And one day all that is good will be safely gathered into His barn.

Amen

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