

The Wheat and the Tares or weeds - Reflection for Trinity 6

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

We are all very familiar with this parable and yet, in different circumstances we can still be surprised by it and another visit during this odd period of the coronavirus is no bad thing.

I say this because so much anxiety and uncertainty about life at the moment has brought to the surface a lot of pain, a lot of hurt and, frankly, a lot of misdirected anger. All this is entirely understandable, we feel very discombobulated (wonderful word) and we cannot see a clear way forward into our future.

In the parable Jesus use of the word 'weed' or 'tares' probably refers to the plant 'darnel'. Darnel looks so like wheat that it is virtually impossible to see the difference whilst it is simply in leaf. Only when the seed or fruit ripens can we see which is which. 'By their fruit you shall know them.' (Mt 7:16) Wheat ears bend rather humbly whereas the darnel 'ear' stands proud and does not droop. It would be very easy indeed for the labourers to pull the wrong plants out as they grow. Darnel is not only poisonous of itself, it is also a host to a pretty devastating fungus – it *attracts* something of further harm.

Of course we must be mindful of the analogies – the field is the whole world – not just the church for instance. It is Jesus who sows the seed that produces good fruit. The devil creeps in during the dark to sow the bad seed. Evil just loves the dark, not for nothing are we called to walk in the light, to be

transparent and open. And it is the angels of God that do the reaping at the harvest time – not us. They will know which is which and it is *their* task in Christ to ensure that any poison is destroyed, not ours.

And so it is today. It is so easy when we are stressed to point fingers, to lash out, to judge rather than searching our own heart. No human is entirely good and no-one is entirely bad. We are all a mix and under pressure the less than lovely is inclined to rise to the surface. When I feel despondent at my less than lovely side, I am encouraged by the characters God used so much, Abraham, Joseph, David – and look at Paul. Even when he had had his encounter with the risen Lord, he still bewailed his ‘thorn in the flesh’. But God’s grace is sufficient. Phew!

Of course we generally lash out at the things (or people) we do not understand, the things we are ill-informed about. Those things (or people) that do not conform to what we are comfortable with, what we are used to, and we are inclined to believe them to be wrong. Well, maybe they *are* wrong. But Jesus is making it very clear, it is not for us to judge, not for us to angrily post tweets or write blogs that can easily be misinformed, easily hurtful or offensive. No, our job is to maintain a transparently Godly witness – ‘... to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’. Archdeacon Hilary reminded us of this lovely word last week. (*Mic 6:8*) And through this witness God will be at work, coaxing, drawing, loving people through Christ, into the Kingdom of God. And of course, there will be those that remain in darkness. That is God’s business.

I feel there is something else we must do – particularly at this time when various groups are being so much in the news for the poor treatment they have received, and are receiving. We owe it to the hope of peace, to be better informed. We are not short of resources – most of us have access to search engines and a bit of judicious ‘surfing’. And, with a bit of wisdom as to which sites to read material from, we can and should find out so much more.

Perhaps more importantly (and I hope these last few months have given us the space to do this) we must spend time listening to each other by phone or e-mail etc, and indeed, to those who are different to us. Let us make a point of calling or stopping to talk (at a social distance of course!) to those that we would not normally spend time with. Listen to their stories – the things that have made them what they currently are. Their background, traditions, travails, education or lack of it and so on. We might just find out that they are the wheat and not the tares at all. We might even make some new friends.

And finally, and this I hope is where we all *have* had the opportunity – listen to ourselves. Why do we weirdly react to something in the news, to something someone might have innocently pronounced, that has wound us up? Why does it rile us, what has hurt us in the past, the fungus if you like, that has clung? Maybe this is the time, not only to understand others, but to understand ourselves – to allow God to heal and restore us. Maybe there is a silver lining we have yet to have discovered in this horrible time of the pandemic. Let God be God and let us be the channels of his grace.

Amen.

Rev Anna Griffiths