

SERMON AT APPLECROSS: 18/7/93: O/S 16: GEOFF CHADWICK:

Mtt 13:24-43: THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

Today's Gospel reading, The Parable of the Weeds, reminds us of a fact of life; that good and evil co-exist with each other in this world. Wheat and weeds live next to each other. We know this to be true. All we have to do is look into a newspaper to see stories of evil and stories of good next to each other; even on the same page. This is the nature of the world. As our parable tells us, the good seed of the Kingdom of God grows alongside the weeds of evil.

Now what is the good seed of the Kingdom of God? I think it is meant to be the Gospel message - the recognition in one's heart that in Jesus' death and resurrection, darkness, death, estrangement, and evil have been overcome to bring us light, new life, community and goodness. This, I think is the good seed of the Kingdom of God, and it is the seed which we are meant to nurture.

What about the Evil Weeds which grow alongside this good seed of the Kingdom of God? I think these weeds want nothing to do with the message of the good seed that says they have been overcome. Instead, they desire to stand there growing and multiplying like the good wheat. You see, evil endeavours to beget evil. We often say that "two wrongs don't make a right"; evil would make us think otherwise. In its desire to beget itself, evil can overwhelm us. We see the atrocities of war on TV or we hear of the dreadful crimes committed in our streets. We lose hope and we despair. That marvellous seed of hope which was in us, that hope as demonstrated by the resurrection, is taken from us and we become prisoners of our own anxiety. In short the evil weeds "crowd out" that seed of hope from us.

The Lord doesn't want us to live like this. Sure, he wants us to take the reality of evil seriously and to acknowledge its presence- for we ignore it at our peril; but the more important task is to keep hold of our sure hope, that in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, evil has lost its power. Good has overcome evil for all time and it is through our knowledge of this that we can indeed be agents of hope. Someone once said "Evil abounds where good people do nothing". It is our hope, grounded in the resurrection of Christ, that keeps us from being complacent. Do not let the "evil weeds" crowd out your hope. Be instead

agents of the seed of the Kingdom; of light, of new life, of community and of goodness.

The Evil weeds can also cause those who, under persecution, lose their initial joy at hearing the message of good seed of the Kingdom. How many have heard the joyous message of Christ's resurrection and have been filled with the Spirit of light, new life, community and goodness.

How many have gone on to lose it!

It is one of my sadness's to see so many people who come to baptism, confirmation and even marriage preparation only to disappear again. How joyous they are when they first hear the good message. How sad it is that they fall away. Perhaps you share this sadness with me.

Now I know that everyone has to travel their own journey of faith, and I hope that many who seem "lost to us" are actually "found to someone else", but I begin to wonder if we're doing something wrong. Are we unfriendly, are we uncaring or insensitive, do we "freeze" people out of our community? Now I'm sure we can be, and if we are then we are accountable and need to find ways overcoming these problems. But on the other side of the coin our parable reminds us that there will be those who get crowded out by the prickly weeds of persecution. These are the people who lose their joy when "trouble or persecution arises on account of the word" (Mtt 13:21, NRSV).

Persecution does arise in our own society. Christian children are made to feel bad if they have to choose between Sunday School and Sunday morning sport. Christian workers who insist on maintaining the highest standards of business ethics are pressurised to conform to another way, and Christians who seek ways of bringing therapeutic justice into the world rather than simple retributive justice are labelled "do-gooders". Such persecutions can cause people to fall away and loose their initial joy at hearing the word. All we can do when we meet people in this situation is to remind them of their initial joy, and to be as encouraging as possible.

The evil weeds can also represent (as with the thorns in the Parable of the Sower) the

"cares of the world and the lure of wealth" (Mtt 13: 22, NRSV). None of us are immune from this but it is a sad fact of life that I have met too many people whose lives are in a real mess because of the materialistic cares of this world. From a "worldly" point of view, they seem to have it all together: car, house, food and drink, but in a spiritual sense they are lacking. The good seed of the Kingdom has been crowded out; joy has been replaced by anxiety, pleasure has been replaced by entertainment, quality has given way to quantity, and the "human-being" has become a "human-doing".

Let us not be crowded out, for we all know that it is not worth it. The weeds will only sap away our nutrients, pierce our bodies, and steal our light. The result is death by starvation - starvation from the spirit of real life. The Lord does not want the good seeds he has planted in us to starve. He wants them to grow, to be given the nurture they deserve, the spirit they need, and the space they require to yield a harvest which will "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mtt 13:43, NRSV).

It is God's desire that we grow and bear good seed. This requires a willingness to nurture one another. Nurture implies a desire to care for ourselves and each other, and a desire to accept the care offered to us by others. We're meant to be a community of mutual nurturers so let us hold on to that which is good and wait patiently for the great harvest. The fruit which we bear should be that of the original seed that was planted. The original seed was the good seed of the kingdom, the fruit we bear should be the good seed of the kingdom. This seed is none other than the Gospel: ie, the recognition in one's heart that in Jesus' death and resurrection, darkness, death, estrangement, and evil have been overcome to bring us light, new life, community and goodness. May this seed remind us to live as fruitful people: living in hope, living in joy, bearing tribulation gallantly, being not choked by the world, and being full of excited expectation as we see the growing seed of the kingdom of God yielding a great harvest that "shines like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mtt 13:43, NRSV).

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.