

Sunday Between 17th and 23rd July [16]

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

It seems we are in a season of parables in the lectionary. Last week we read the parable of the sower and this week we hear the next part of Jesus' teaching, another parable that is concerned with farming, wheat and weeds. Unlike the parable of the sower, the weeds in this case are not something that the sower wishes to deal with straight away. You may remember that in the parable of the sower the seed that grew amongst weeds did not bear good fruit because the weeds choked the wheat and stopped them from growing properly. Whereas in this parable, despite the seed going into good soil, weeds have been deliberately sown in the ground to disrupt their growth but the sower doesn't want them removed.

What, we might ask, is the difference. Seeds thrown amongst weeds or weeds sown amongst seeds? One explanation may be that the wheat and the seeds were growing together at the same rate, unlike in the other parable where wheat was trying to compete with established weeds for resources and being crowded out. Here, the wheat is planted in good soil, the foundations for growth have been laid and the wheat still has a good chance of bearing fruit. In fact, the sower realises that the act of pulling up the weeds while the wheat is still young and fragile will cause more damage than allowing the growth of both plants to continue.

This is a subtly different scenario than the wheat growing amongst weeds in the parable of the sower. In the parable of the sower new Christians are struggling to get their faith to bear fruit while distracted by the cares and wonders of the world around them, but in this parable the Christian is growing in faith alongside the very same cares and distractions, only this time the roots are established and good. As Jesus goes on to explain the parable it becomes clear that this is a representation of what Christians worldwide will always face.

The field is the world and in it are those called into the kingdom by God but also in the world are those who will not follow that route. We have always been aware that we will encounter people who will not come to faith in Jesus, there is some comfort to be taken knowing that Jesus was aware that this would be so. We are not responsible for the faith or lack thereof of others, only our own. We cannot know as we grow in the field who amongst us is wheat and who weed, but it is not necessary for us to know. Just as the wheat does not harvest itself, neither does the believer judge who is worthy of the kingdom, only God does that.

We are encouraged by this parable to take care of our spiritual growth, to be aware that there are things around us that would lead us astray but we are also encouraged to stay in the world. The sower insists that the wheat and the weeds be allowed to grow together so that it is clear which is which. The concept of bearing fruit is only possible if both are side by side.

How true that is in our own experience. It is impossible to bear the spiritual fruit of patience unless our patience is tested. It is impossible to bear the spiritual fruit of peace unless we are faced with things that would provoke us to lash out. It would be impossible for us to show love in any meaningful way unless we understood hatred. The weeds in the field, be they people or circumstances, are not only inevitable but

they are necessary for our spiritual growth. We can only obey Jesus' command to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us if we are faced with such things.

Perhaps we imagine that it would be easier if we were plucked out of the world and never knew hardship but we are not followers of one who promised everything would be alright all of the time, we are followers of the one who laid down his life that everything may be alright in the end. Jesus prayed that we would be in the world but not of the world and this parable demonstrates what that might look like. We are at risk from the distractions around us but we have been planted in good soil, we need to ensure our roots are strong and well fed through prayer, bible reading and fellowship with other Christians, and we need to be confident that in the midst of the trouble of the world we can bear good fruit.

Whatever happens with the weeds we cannot affect, but we can grow in faith, strong and fruitful in spite of the distractions around us. The sower may see how we struggle alongside the weeds of our life but we cannot have them removed in our time, but rather all will be well in God's time. Let us all hear well what Jesus says to us through this season of parables. Amen.