

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**Weeds Among The Wheat**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of the skills I probably won't learn in my time in this parish is the ability to look at a paddock and tell you exactly what's growing in it. Given how dry the last few years here have been, at the moment if a paddock looks green that seems like a good thing. But as you well know, not everything that grows is desirable. And Jesus uses this point to illustrate the parable in today's gospel reading.

Older bible translations call this the parable of the tares. And if we look at the agricultural history of the ancient world, 'tares' is quite likely a reference to a type of ryegrass. Now, remember, we're talking of an era without selective herbicides, without highly specialised wheat varieties, and of course without mechanised equipment of any kind. An unskilled labourer working in the field would probably be just as useful as me at telling the difference between the tares and the wheat.

It's not just that weeds have popped up amongst the crop. They were deliberately sown to cause havoc. Surely this farmer knows what he's doing when he sows the wheat. We have to assume the soil here is good, and all the other conditions were right. But an enemy came in while the farmer was sleeping to sow tares among the wheat. This is a deliberate act of sabotage. A deliberate attempt to ruin the crop.

It was only over time that both the wheat and the weeds were discovered. When the good plants had come up, so did the weeds. And there's this idea here that the difference wasn't obvious at first. As one grew, so did the other, both resembling the other initially for a time. And there's another important concept here. A weed is only a weed because it's not what you want to grow. And it's only a problem in this parable because it's such a close copy of the real thing, and yet is deficient.

There's a spiritual truth here that Jesus reveals in this parable. This close copying is how the devil has always operated. Even as far back as the garden of Eden, that serpent Satan took God's truth and twisted it. God had said to Adam and Eve, "You are free to eat from all the trees in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Satan's tare that he sowed into that soil was the question he asked of Eve, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'"? Well, no, God didn't say that.

We see already in Eve's response that doubt had been sown. She corrects Satan in her response but doesn't get it quite right. She adds to what God had said and leaves herself open to being convinced that God didn't really mean any of it. And we know how that story ends. Adam and Eve succumb to temptation and fall into sin.

But the good news of this parable is that there will be a time when all this is sorted out. When the harvest comes the weeds will be collected and burned up with fire. Only the good crop that the master has grown will remain. Jesus said, "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matthew 13:41, NIV). And Jesus uses this title 'Son of Man' to show the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel. And one of the important aspects of that prophecy was the end of earthly empires.

Remember that Jesus introduces this parable, and many others, as an image of the 'kingdom of heaven'. And in this parable, the field where the farmer sows is identified as 'the world', which is our everyday realm of political, economic, social, and religious life. This world was dominated by the Roman imperial power, and Jesus is bringing into it a message about a different kingdom. He is sowing good seed about a new and better kingdom, and in doing so he forms a new community. But this community lives in contested space. It exists in opposition to those identified as 'people of the evil one,' sown by the enemy, the devil.

For us who belong to this new community, who are baptised children of God, for us the challenge is that we must wait. According to this parable, the weeds and the wheat grow together until the harvest, until the end of the age when the judgement of the Son of Man divides the righteous from the unrighteous. We are in this world together, and we must grow together and allow the great judge to do the separating in God's own time. We don't get to demand that the harvest happens now, or that God must remove all evil when we want. And this is difficult. We look at the world around us and there's always another story of someone committing unspeakable evil to their fellow human beings. We see the pain and suffering and wonder why God would let it go on so long.

But God is patient. And that's actually good news for us because as we have seen in our readings from Romans over the past few weeks, the weeds and the wheat exist within each of us. As with every passage of scripture, we don't read this parable by itself devoid of any relation to the rest of the bible. We read it all together, and we learn that it's not just us as the perfect wheat growing in God's kingdom, and those bad people out there that are the weeds that need to be destroyed.

We are all capable of buying into the lies of the devil and being the weeds. And this will remain until the final harvest, until the day of judgment, when God will bring to fulfilment his new creation, and all the old powers and authorities will be gone. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43, NIV).

But until then, we praise God for his patience and mercy. We cry out to God our Father in prayer and lament when the pain and suffering impacts upon us. We live in hope, knowing that this creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay. And we eagerly await our full redemption as children of God. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.