



Sunday 16th May, 2021

Matthew 13: Weeds

1. Reading:

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

27 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

28 "An enemy did this," he replied.

'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

29 "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares Explained

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.'

37 He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

40 'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

41 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. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

2. Questions:

1. Of the four parables up to this point in Matthew 13, the disciples were keen to ask Jesus about the meaning of the parable of the weeds. They are concerned about those who oppose the people of God. What has stood out for you in the reading of this parable and the parable of the sower and why?
2. God's plan is for the people of the Kingdom and the people of the evil one to co-exist. In what ways do you find this personally challenging? Share as you feel able and pray for one another at the end of the session.
3. Andrew suggested that 'This is the growing season'. Growth of the Kingdom and growth in the life of the disciple. Discuss the ways that the church can and should be involved in growing the Kingdom today.
4. Jesus tells the disciples that this age will come to an end and the Day of Judgement will come. Andrew referred to a passage in 1 John 4 that assures those who are in Christ that they can have confidence and not fear on the day of judgement. How should we live now in the knowledge the coming Day of Judgement?
5. Finally, what are you and God *working on* at the present time?

3. Prayer:

Lord, we thank you for this parable and your interpretation of it. That you are the good farmer who plants good seed in the world and that through faith and trust in you we can become 'people of the Kingdom'. Forgive us for times when we have become complacent, taken your grace and mercy for granted, when we have lost direction and our growth as disciples has become stunted. Refresh and renew us today, fill us with your Holy Spirit and lead us in your ways to bear witness to your love that is for all people.

May the light of Christ shine in our lives that the part of the world where you have placed us that all may know that in you there is life and life eternal.

Amen

4. Text of the Sermon:

Matt 13: 24-30, 36-43 Weeds Parable of the Wheat and Tares

The Message:

This morning we are continuing to read from Matthews Gospel, one of 4 books of the Bible that record, in detail, the life of Jesus. There is nothing more important for the Christian than to learn more about Jesus and to learn from Jesus. So let's approach the gospel account with gratitude and expectation. And with the words that we heard last week, and we will hear them again this week in our ears: 'Whoever has ears, let them hear'. Words are on the screen or follow in your Bibles, we are going to read from Matthew 13: 24-30.

Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

27 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

28 "An enemy did this," he replied.

'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

29 “No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

So here we have Jesus sharing another Parable about the Kingdom of God – ‘The kingdom of heaven is like...’ A Parable, which takes its reference from the natural world, as in the Parable of the Sower, that we looked at last week, but in this parable rather than the focus being on the type of soil it is on the seeds that are planted in a field.

It is a Parable about gardening or more accurately about farming. But let’s stick with gardening for a moment, something we are more familiar with. What does your garden look like? Like this, beautiful flowers and shrubs or a well ordered vegetable garden?



If either of these, then wow, great job! Is it neat and tidy like these pictures? However it looks, you will be all too well aware that it is susceptible to weeds growing amongst the plants.

And when we see the weeds growing, we want to get in there and remove them, like this, carefully with appropriate tools or we even try to combat the weeds in a preventative way like the image on the right.



Weeds grow alongside the plants that we want to grow. But in this parable rather than removing the weeds Jesus says that the farmer tells his servants not to remove the weeds, let them grow alongside the wheat until harvest and then pull them up with the wheat, separate the weeds from the wheat and destroy the weeds.

It sounds like a strange farming method to us doesn’t it? What is Jesus trying to tell them?

Before coming ashore, Jesus tells them two more parables after which time, the crowd scatters and His disciples have a private audience with him. They have now heard four parables, the parable of the Sower, the parable of the wheat and the weeds and immediately following (and we will look at these next week) the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast.

But listen to what the disciples say, what they are interested in. What has captured their attention is the parable of the weeds. ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field,.. they say. Of all the things that they could have asked him it’s the weeds that they

are concerned about. Jesus graciously and patiently explains it to them. And, of course, to us. So, unlike many of the parables that we are left to interpret, in this case, Jesus gives us its meaning.

Continue with our reading Matthew 13: 36-43

'Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.'

37 He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

40 'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 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. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.'

There are 2 farmers in the story - The one who sows the good seed who is the Son of Man. Jesus is speaking about himself, he is the good farmer. And the enemy who sows the weeds that is the evil one. The seeds are people, people of the Kingdom of God those who yield to God, and people of the evil one, those who deny Him, who turn their back on Him.



Jesus is the one who plants the good seed. This work isn't delegated to servants, Jesus himself plants each seed, everyone nurtured, cared for, known to Him. What this makes clear is that it is only through Jesus that we can become the people of the Kingdom of God.

The wheat and the weeds, the people of the Kingdom of God and people of the evil one grow together for now in the field, which is, the world. The world as it was then and as it is today until the end of the age, until Jesus returns, and God's final judgement comes.

Some interpret this parable to be about the church, about the infiltration of the church by those who do not belong to God's kingdom, false prophets and teachers, but that isn't what Jesus is talking about. He speaks of the field being the world, all people everywhere. God's mission is to the whole world not to a few and not to one nation but to all people. No wonder the disciples were struggling to grasp the fullness of all that he was telling them.

It is clear, that this strange farming method is intentional. To allow the weeds to grow alongside the wheat, and not to separate them.

We know only too well that evil is still present in the world. There are many examples, in acts of terror, cruelty, genocide ethnic cleansing and in particular people in history who have inaugurated, inspired and led these heinous acts.

The disciples were keen to see the enemy dealt with, not at some time in the future but now, today. Their expectation of God's coming Kingdom meant that God would act decisively against the enemies of God's people by force, evil rooted out and destroyed. They were slipping into the same temptation that we can slip into of thinking that we have the wisdom and knowledge to be able to identify and root out the enemy acting with impatience and misguided judgement. But God doesn't deal with humankind in this way, God isn't like us!

And, there is something else about the weeds that are growing alongside the wheat that helps us to understand the parable. The word used for 'weed' or 'tare' in this parable is the Greek word, 'Zizanion' which refers to a particular type of plant, a kind of Darnel, growing in the fields of grain, as tall as wheat and of a similar appearance.



WHEAT: before it is fully ripe.

TARES: Lolium Temulentum

They are so alike! As well as having a similar appearance, Darnel is poisonous to humans, producing nausea, convulsions and even death. It wasn't practical to remove the tares from the wheat, as it was almost impossible to distinguish between them and much of the wheat would be destroyed in the process, there would be collateral damage.

So, what this simple story tells us is that for now good and evil co-exist alongside one another. We wish it were not so, we pray for God's Kingdom to come on earth as in heaven and so we should and we long for the day when evil will be no more. But we are not God! He gives time for his Kingdom to grow. And God is patient, and full of compassion.

There are various stages of growth and development in plants and in people as they become people of the Kingdom. Growth is central in each of these parables, the seed slowly growing in the ground, the wheat and the weeds growing alongside, the mustard seed, and the yeast in the dough, all take time. God gives time for people to respond to Him. People who are far from him, who have behaved in ways that we might describe as evil, even as they might describe as evil. God holds out for them too to have opportunity to respond to His Love.

Video: Gram (Graham) Seed.

We are going to watch a short video now about a man called Gram Seed that I think illustrates God's patience, his outstretched arm of love and welcome.

Some of the guys in the church have heard Gram speak at Peoples Church Partington a few years ago.

He tells of how he became one of the violent hooligans associated with Middlesbrough Football club. During the '80s he went to prison four times for his crimes. After years in prison, and addicted to drink and drugs, his body finally gave up. Kept alive on 'life support'. This is his story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9FjpUvVLmM>

Isn't that a great story? I hope that you were able to hear his words over the sound, we couldn't tone that down I am afraid. What the video doesn't tell us is that whilst in hospital, he was in a coma for 6 days. His condition was critical and his family were told to expect the worst. But he eventually came round and spent time in rehabilitation and subsequently attended an Alpha Course. His life was transformed when he became a Christian. And as we saw he was able to go into the prison where he had first been an inmate, now as a Chaplain and leading Alpha Courses himself.

What did he say? "What would God want with a scum bag light me?"

God is patient, and full of compassion. Gram now leads a Christian ministry called 'Growing Seeds Ministry' in Stockton on Tees.

The Day of Judgement

The parable makes it clear that the Day of the Harvest will come, at a time of the Farmers choosing. The Day of Judgement when: '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.'

There will be a day of Judgement – when the people of the Kingdom of God and the people of the devil will be identified by God who is Righteous and Just. And '...everything that causes sin and all who do evil.' will be destroyed. The imagery that Jesus uses of a blazing furnace, of weeping and gnashing of teeth is graphic, frightening to our ears but what is made plain by this language is that God will deal with evil in the world, it will be crushed, burned, destroyed, once and for all time. Evil will be defeated. The devil will no longer have power.

Application

How do we apply this to our lives? Well, we could go around living in fear for the day of Judgement. We hear what will happen to those who do evil, we must therefore be very careful not to be counted amongst them. Keep ourselves separate from the world, only associate with those who are like us, those who we think are the people of the Kingdom. But that would be a complete denial of all that God has done for us through Jesus Christ who has set us free from the law of sin and death.

There is no fear in God's Day of Judgement for those in Christ. Hear these Glorious words of 1 John 4:13 and perhaps some of us especially need to hear these words today.

'This is how we know that we live in him [Jesus] and he in us: he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: in this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.'

So let us know Christ, come to Him as Gram did, not until our lives have reached rock bottom but as we are today, come to Him and live no longer in fear.

So what should we do?

Firstly, **do not be alarmed at the evil that you see around you**, Jesus is telling that this is how it will be for now. So do not be taken by surprise, rather be ready, be equipped, be alert. Recognise it when it comes, through lies and deception, division, temptation, in hardship, and rejection. When you face these things don't be discouraged. Jesus knows that you will face these things, do not fear them.

Secondly, **do not Judge**. We don't need to take that responsibility upon ourselves, we shouldn't, we mustn't, it is the Lord's task not ours. Yet how often do we put ourselves in place of the farmer and try to do God's work of judgement for him?

- We judge and condemn.
- We determine who is good and who isn't,
- We write off those who we think are evil. The Christians from Teen Challenge continued to pray for Gram, against the odds, even as he was in a Coma.
- We set boundaries to God's love that exclude people.

The harvest will come at the right time, God will judge fairly. He knows those who are His. Trust Him, evil will be finally rooted out and defeated.

Thirdly, **continue to grow in Christ**. This is the growing season! the harvest is yet to come. The wheat can still grow alongside the tares, it isn't easy but let's not stop growing, seeking out opportunity to grow in character and in faith to be more like Jesus, to be more the person God has called you to be.

Finally, let us be light in the world. Proclaim the good news of God's love, bear witness to it, live it out in the world, don't hide a way, be salt and light everywhere. And one day, when the harvest has come your light will be brighter still. The final verse of this parable says: 'Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.' You will shine like the sun, this is your destiny.