

23.07.23 Romans 8: 12-25 , Matthew 13 24-30, 36-43 - Rev. L. Vawer

Here we are again – back in the garden for our gospel reading. Last week we had the parable of the Sower and this week it's the turn of the wheat and the weeds. I love my garden but like Alison I am no gardener. I have no idea of the difference between a weed and an actual plant, so I often pull out the plants and leave the weeds because I think they are pretty. My favourite tool of choice are the secateurs so although I know what roses they are do not escape a serious attack and Colin holds his head in his hands. Come to think about to think of it I haven't seen the secateurs for some time, they could be hidden from the demon gardener.

In this season of ordinary time, we revisit the parable's and explore what it means to be a Christian. In this familiar reading Jesus speaks about the good seed being sown in the good soil but during the night an act of bio-terrorism happens and an enemy sows weeds among the wheat so that both wheat and weeds grow together. The servants want to pull the weeds out and the farmer says "wait". As Jesus goes on to explain his analogy of the kingdom it is no surprise to find the Jesus is the wise farmer who knows that it will be easier to separate the two during harvesting – the wheat makes it to the barn and the weeds end up in the furnace. It is quite a scary and uncomfortable picture.

So how do we recognise the difference between wheat and the weeds? And does it really matter?

The servants are very keen to pull out the weeds and keep the wheat pure but that isn't their job. The wheat and the weeds can co-exist, they can grow together as we can evidence in our own gardens, spending hours weeding. Go into the country and look at a field of wheat and if you look carefully, you will see the weeds – cornflowers, thistles all manner of wildflowers- growing in the wheat. Look more closely and you will see insects galore, particularly bees and butterflies. All co-existing together, the weeds enabling a rich bio – diversity alongside the wheat and all of it flourishing.

Maybe there is a warning for us here not to be hasty in our judgments about what is "good" and what is "bad". If we're honest there are times when we are all very quick to decide who we think are "in", the good guys, and who is "out", the bad guys. I think that Jesus is saying that for the time being everyone is "in". Whoever you are, wherever you come from you are welcome in Gods kingdom, even if you think you aren't. Wait stay, explore, grow, bring diversity. Who is to say which are wheat and which are weeds among us? Let's flourish together. Maybe the weeds are a gift?

So far so good. There's room for all to live and grow together but we do have to face that scary picture of judgement. It is important to remember that judgement belongs to God, it is in God's hands not ours. Let's remember too that what we know about the nature of God can calm our fears. The book of wisdom paints a picture of God who is sovereign and just, who is Lord of all and chooses to "spare all". He judges with mildness and patience. He has the power to act and fills his children with hope. God forgives. Each one of us has endless opportunities and chances to make a fresh start. Gods' mercy is wide.

We look at the news and just wish that God would sort it out once and for all. We long for those in our own family and friendship circles to come to faith and we want God to work now. But God plays the longer game. Premature judgment removes the possibility of redemption and anyway we are not in a world that we can "fix". It is a field to work in until harvest time where God makes the

judgement. The work is trickier than we would like and it seems that running through the middle of us all and our own lives is a confusing mixture of wheat and weeds. Far better to leave the outcome to God. Far better to carry on sowing good deeds every day. Far better not to judge others or volunteer to tear up their weeds. I don't know about you but for myself I don't think come out to well of such a reciprocal weeding. If God can be patient with a world in such open rebellion against his love then perhaps we can manage to be a smidgen more patient too. So we wait.

One of the key words in both readings this week is "waiting."

In his letter to the Romans, Paul was writing to a community who were undergoing the most horrendous trials. Maybe Paul was trying to address their questions like; "When are our sufferings going to end? When will we see the kingdom of God revealed in all of its power, in all of its glory? When will our persecutors receive the judgment they surely deserve? Come to that, will our persecutors receive the judgment they deserve? Where is God in all of this?" How many times are we asked to wait? I found this quite difficult to read this week in the circumstances I find myself in. I have asked myself when is this going to end? This week members of our church family have had to wait. As we all know, waiting is hard to do – even harder to wait patiently.

Paul says that the whole creation - wheat and weeds – waits with eager longing to be freed into the glorious freedom of God's kingdom. We are reminded of who we are and whose we are. We are saved – not through anything we have done- but what God has done for us in Jesus, and we wait in patient hope for God's eternal plan. If the body is to be redeemed, then what we do in and with it in the present time matters. If creation is going to be redeemed then what we do in and with it here and now really matters. Jesus models what humanity can be like at its most whole – made in the image of God. God sacrificed for us in Jesus so that we can be reunited with him for ever. God who filled us with his spirit at our baptism so that we can be adopted into his family as heirs. We are not servants or slaves to God but children, loved unconditionally – without beginning or end. What we do matters.

In the midst of euphoria of our freedom, life can also be tough. Difficult things happen and we suffer. It doesn't always sit easy with a loving God and it can make us question, struggle and sometimes lose hope. We are not home yet not shining like the sun, and the weeds still grow in the wheat. We cry 'Abba Father'.

It is then that it is important that we hold onto the eternal dimension, to keep on going and allow hope to colour our everyday lives.

Practice tiny acts of kindness and love to increase God's kingdom step by step.

Make a conscious decision to say "I chose the way of God. I choose the way of hope. I will testify to hope to all those around me, all those I meet along the way."

Be great spirited and overflow with generosity.

Focus on growing into the wheat that God longs to harvest and be an encourager to others to do the same.

God's loving kindness and mercy will address the weeds and in the meantime let's not judge but be thankful that we can grow together as we wait for God's perfect time.