

Matthew 13:24-30,

The Parable of the Weeds

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 heads, 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 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.'"

36-43 The Parable of the Weeds 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.

The Wheat and the Tares

We talked a bit about parables last week, through thinking about the parable of the sower. Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning — that's the Sunday School definition. But there's something else about parables too: Jesus tells them to shock, surprise or unsettle people. Things ain't quite how you think — he says. So, for example, the first listeners to the story of the prodigal son would have been less surprised if the returning son had been lynched by the community for bringing dishonour on his father, and the older son rewarded for faithfulness. The first listeners would have been shocked at Jesus's framing a story about a *good* Samaritan. There could be no such thing!

The wheat and the tares is apparently a very obvious parable — obvious because not only is it fairly easy to start with, but also, Jesus later gives an explanation. This, therefore should be only a short sermon, right? The only point of interpretation of the story itself might be to add that there is a weed called darnel, which is hard to distinguish from immature wheat — so weeding would be dangerous to the crop — valuable wheat might easily be uprooted, mistaken as weeds.

I watched a youtube video, to see what other preachers or teachers had to say about this parable, and I was disappointed. 'Pastor Stan' said there was going to be a day of judgement. The good guys will go to heaven, and the bad guys are going to hell. And you'd better work out if you are wheat or tares.

Is that it?

I don't think that's it, quite yet. Let me explain why.

Firstly — Jesus tends to surprise with his parables — Pastor Stan didn't see or explain a surprise. Secondly — isn't this so obvious, that Jesus didn't really need to explain it later? The disciples, despite their humble backgrounds were actually pretty bright guys, so there must have been something in this that is 'normal' for us, but a shock for them. And thirdly, if it was that obvious, Jesus didn't need to say it at all!

And here's the thing: we forgot to read the context and the expectations of the people of the time. So, let's rewind a bit. The Old Testament prophets speak quite a bit about 'the day of the Lord' — *Yom Adonai*, in their language. This was to be a day of vindication for the Lord — proof that he was the God over all gods — and a day of triumph for his people who had followed him. A day when the enemies of God's people would be defeated, and God's rule over earth asserted, with his HQ being Jerusalem. Such a day was closely linked with God sending a new chosen king to lead the armies of the faithful against the enemy: the 'messiah'. According to *that* thinking, if Jesus had claims to being the messiah, then judgement should have come **then**, vindication, and the rescue of the Israel **then!**

And this is the shock that we missed. Jesus's talk of the kingdom of heaven equates closely to the 'Day of the Lord' as he heralds God's governance over the world — but stripping out the military, the triumphal, and actually some sense of the judgement, too. Jesus warns his listeners not to expect immediate judgement on their enemies or the collapse of the Roman empire. No — the weeds will hang around a long time. This is why the disciples sought an explanation — because it is so surprising that judgement should be deferred.

There are still problems for us though. Despite the prophets' warnings that the Day of the Lord cut both ways, nonetheless, first century Jews yearned for God to impose his rule, because that would save them from their brutal, crass overlords. We post-colonialists can feel less eager for God's judgement... Will we turn out to be tares, rather than wheat?

But we must look at the cross. Utterly central to the Christian faith is that Jesus suffered for our sins. Though he sinless, he suffered — he endured the metaphorical incinerator — before rising to life again. The fire was overcome, and as significantly, the resurrection marked a victory over sin itself.

First century Jews expected a judgement on their enemies. Jesus clarified that *sin* was the enemy. He facilitated a more nuanced view, that a person was not the enemy, but the sin within them. We want an end to sin, not the sinner — we want to cease the misery of sin by throwing off the habit of sin, just as an alcoholic must throw off the destructive misery of their addiction.

Jesus says "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.'

Jesus's explanation is not so woolly and hippy that there is no judgement — but we now see that *sin* is being weeded out, first, before people. I find this very hopeful.

We live in the 'now and the not yet' — Jesus has inaugurated the end times, but there is a great pause before the kingdom of heaven is *fully* realised. The wheat is growing. There are weeds in the world. That's how it is. God's not going to start weeding now — he won't strike

Putin with a thunderbolt, nor anyone else you can think of. But we are personally conscious of the weeds in our own selves — the trait of judgmentalism you bear, or materialism, or hardness of heart that says you are not yet the best of the crop, nor living your best life. Jesus came that we may have life and have it to the full — and so we can be assured that God will help us towards the elimination of weeds in our own lives, and weeds in the world, and that it will all turn out right in the end — for the world is God's field, and we can trust in his loving judgement.

Amen.

SDG.

It's our Wildflower Festival next weekend, Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th 11am till 5pm. Wildflower arrangements in the Church depicting many of King Charles III patronages of the various charities which have a special interest to him. There is a Craft Fair in the Village Hall and Refreshments in the Foyer. Our Informal Worship Service will be at 6.30pm but after that the church will be closed for essential repairs till the 27th of August for our Harvest Festival Service.... Please 'Bring-a-Tin' in aid of Leiston Food Bank or donations to overseas Aid Agencies.