

July 19th 2020 – Sermon for 6th Sunday after Trinity

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Gospel Reading Matthew 13.24-30,36-43

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

How often when we hear Jesus' parables do we find it a little frustrating that Jesus doesn't explain them afterwards? So many can leave us with more questions than answers, which I think is something of the point. And even here in our passage today we have a parable where Jesus takes time to explain it and yet still, I think there are many questions left! It is a parable that has a little of everything to it. There is something on how the world is, there's something on what we are meant to do as Christians, there's something of how things will be at the end and there's something of judgement in it.

Now it's probably the judgement element that most people think of when hearing this parable, with that phrase weeping and gnashing of teeth. And I don't know about you but there appear to be some Christians who seem to have a sense of glee and excitement about this end judgement a day when perhaps they can turn to those who ignored their message, a where they can tell people look I told you so!! You were warned!! A moment when all the people who have hurt them or rejected them are judged and they are rewarded. This kind of attitude seems quite ugly to me and I think mostly stems from a place of unresolved pain and hurt. It seems ugly because it is as if it satisfies some desire for violence and pain towards others. And Violence and pain seem to be counter to Jesus's message. Because that seems a world away from the Jesus who cries on the cross for God to forgive them, for they know not what they do. It feels miles away from the Jesus who when facing the human desire for violence and pain took it upon himself and endured it and then calls us to follow him standing up to violence through non-violence. To pick up our cross and follow him.

And so what we have in this parable highlights two sides of Jesus. One is a fire warning, judgement calling, weed destroying Jesus, who some Christians seem to like to focus on. The other is a humble walking, compassion filled, love inspiring Jesus who plants seeds and lets them grow calling on them to live with the weeds.

Now I will be honest, I tend I to look and focus on the latter Jesus. In fact I have always struggled with the other Jesus with the judgement side of things. Because I know that these quotes of Jesus on judgement have been misused and abused. I've seen how the name of Jesus has through focusing on judgement have been used to spread hate and persecution. I've been pained to see people use quotes like this to make the church a place of judgement and exclusion rather than welcome and inclusion. It's why I left the church as a young adult, frustrated at what I saw as a horrible abuse of Jesus and his teachings. Making him stand for all I disliked. And so preaching on a passage like this is always a joy for me. Because it allows us to look at it in a different way! Does judgement mean exclusion, is it all clear cut that we are either a wheat or a weed. A good seed or a bad seed. Or is there something else going on here!

And so, here we are? We have a passage which has a clear call to judgement? So, what do we do with this tension? Is Christianity a message of judgement and exclusivity or can the inclusive compassionate Jesus be reconciled with this parable?

I'll give you a clue, I would not be standing here today, I would not have accepted the call to come back to the church and to become a priest if the Jesus I know wasn't reconcilable with this parable, didn't live, breath and flow out of all aspects of the Gospel. God is love and Jesus showed us what it is like and it is beautiful!!

So let me tell you what I see in this parable...

I see a battle cry from Jesus. The world has seeds of good, seeds of love but it also has seeds of bad, seeds of evil and we are competing. These two sides are inseparable in the world, they are so close that to uproot one takes the other with it and God's love is much too precious for it to be wasted. So the weeds are not to be destroyed straight away. To do so would lose some of the good plants, the wheat. So Jesus says the good and bad are left together, they will grow alongside each other. They are in the same ground and in the same soil so they will be direct neighbours.

Not just neighbours but they are in direct competition. The good seed and the bad seeds fight for the same resources, we fight for the same soil, we fight for the same water, we fight for the same nutrients, we fight for the same sunlight. Evil and Good are in direct competition. And so Jesus calls on the good seeds to grow, on the children of God to grow. Jesus calls us to help the good seeds grow. That is really all there is to do in this parable. To grow is our only job, and all we are called to do. Grow as big and as fast as we can. Grow and produce as much fruit as is possible. Grow and spread our roots and leaves. Grow up higher and higher. Grow so there is a truly abundant harvest! Because the difficult truth within this parable is that if we do not grow then the weeds grow and we diminish. If the good seeds do not grow then the bad seeds grow. If the wheat doesn't grow then the weeds will grow more and more.

The good seeds and the bad seeds are competing for survival!

So we might wonder here how do we ensure that the good seeds grow, that these seeds of love that God has planted grow? Well as children of God, we grow by loving, loving more and more and more and more. It is our only weapon in this battle. It is the one thing God wants us to do - We have to love. Jesus says very simply that we are called to - Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself. The more we love God, the more time we dwell in God's love, the more we become loving, the greater our capacity is to love our neighbour as ourself. And the more we love the more we grow, the more those seeds of love, those good seeds grow!

Brothers and Sisters we have to increase the capacity of our hearts daily. When evil or hate confronts us we have to fight back with love, with compassion, with mercy. This parable tells us it's a battle, we are in direct competition with the weeds. And so it's going to be painful at times, it's going to be difficult at times and we will be may be called to endure much but Jesus' example is clear. We are to face everything that evil might throw at us and respond in love! We are to face violence, to face hate with love. We are to endure, we must endure. We might feel like we are surrounded, we might feel we are being choked, and that there are just too many weeds but we must endure and respond with love.

And we need to remind ourselves, to remember, that with each and every act of love we do, with each and every sign of compassion, forgiveness and mercy we give, that we strip more resources from the powers of evil in this world. That we starve the weeds around us of any chance for them to grow further. That we continue the work of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven!

There's something else I see in this parable. Because within this parable one of the biggest weapons that evil has is being diminished, because Jesus says the power, the duty, the role to judge is not ours! Jesus says that judgement is in God's hands. Jesus says that everything in the world is not clear cut. Good and evil are inseparable in the world so who are we to define which is which. Let's face it even within ourselves there is good and there is evil. So who are we to judge! Jesus says judgement is all in God's hands. And that means we are not to judge, we are not to judge.

Because judging is dangerous! Judging is a tool of evil and hate and discrimination and racism and violence! Because when we judge we give ourselves an excuse, we allow ourselves space, we create permission to treat others in ways which are not loving. We give ourselves the distance to hate, we give ourselves the distance to persecute, we give ourselves the distance to discriminate, we give ourselves the distance to slander. We fall away from that call of Jesus to love, to love others as ourselves. To love others as they too are wheat, cherished and special to God! And so Jesus says. No... Jesus says no we are not called to judge, it is not our role in this. Our role is to grow, we are called to grow. To grow without boundaries. To grow without limits. To grow in true abundance. Growing in love so that there is a truly bountiful harvest! Brothers and Sisters as seeds of love our job is simply to grow. Grow to be able to love all and everyone whom we come into contact with!

But there is something else I see in this parable! Because Jesus says something else, because this parable also contains a death sentence. A sentence that God will judge! That God will judge! That there will come a day when all the causes of evil, all the stumbling blocks in the world which give evil a foothold will be removed. Jesus says that a day will come when evil will be destroyed and where and where we have a truly beautiful phrase in Matthew, where Jesus says 'the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.' Alleluia, I like the sound of that.

And we need to hear that because enduring and loving, suffering and loving is tough. But Jesus says, there will be a day when we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

And we need to hear that because sometimes it looks like there are weeds everywhere, even cropping up in our own lives. But Jesus says, there will be a day when we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

And we need to hear that because at times like this the world can look like a dark and dangerous place. But Jesus says, there will be a day when we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

And Brothers and Sisters, let me tell you something! Because Jesus tells us stories, stories about the love of God. And it's unstoppable! Evil doesn't stand a chance. Because our God loves each and everyone one of us, loves us so much that even a cross and nails couldn't stop it.

The love of God is a love which endures, a love which suffers, a love which calls each and everyone of us a child of God. A love which wins. Because Jesus says there will come a day when we will be with all our brothers and sisters and we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father. And so God's love, that love gives hope. It inspires us to stand up to evil. It inspires us to endure. It inspires us to suffer for it, it inspires us to respond to it with all we have, to respond to it in the only way we can, the only way we are asked to – to respond in love!

It inspires us to live in the world amongst the weeds and believe that the capacity to love is greater than the capacity to hate. That we the children of God can endure, can outgrow, can outlast.

Because we have an unstoppable power with us – the love of God!

And so the seeds of love, the wheat which God has planted will win and no weed, no matter how many there are can stop them.

And so yes there is a fire warning, judgement calling, weed destroying Jesus in this parable because he is calling out evil and saying that this humble walking, compassion filling, love inspiring Jesus is unstoppable. That the seeds he plants will endure, will grow and will transform that field, will transform this world so that a truly abundant harvest will be taken and evil will be no more!

Because you might have picked it up here. You might have seen the true hope of this parable! Because if the wheat does what it is meant to, if we as the children of God do what we are called to do. If we grow! If we grow to all our potential. Then the hope, the joy of this parable is that perhaps that leaves a field with no weeds in it at all. If the seeds of love grow abundantly then there are simply no resources for the weeds. As the wheat towers over the weeds, they become sheltered from the sun. They become starved of water from the rain. And the weeds gradually die out completely. And you are left with a field of only corn.

And that Brothers and Sisters is why I believe Jesus allows the weeds and the wheat to grow together. Because Jesus knows the power of God, Jesus knows the love of God. Jesus knows that in the end those weeds don't stand a chance! Because a double victory is on the way, a victory where even the weeds are won over. Where nothing is left to be destroyed because all has become wheat!! All has become love. Because those little good seeds, those little seeds of love became flourishing and abundant fields of wheat!!

And so I'd like to finish with the words of one of my true hero's. The words of someone who never ceases to inspire me. The words of someone who I think encapsulates the battle and result of this parable perfectly! The words are from Dr Martin Luther King Jr when he said,

"I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up against our most bitter opponents and say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.... But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory"

Amen