

Matthew 13: 24-35

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

The battle against the weeds; a perennial struggle. Warfare in the field and in the garden.

Of course, these days we have weed killers of varying toxicity which get rid of the weeds, but probably also get rid of us in the long term.

In the parable we have just heard, the wheat and the weeds grow together. In a garden context I am hard pushed to tell a weed from a bonafide plant, and anyway, not all weeds look that bad. No wonder the farmer advises his servants to leave well alone. Wheat looks very like darnel when it is young.

In a simplistic sense, this parable makes clear categories between good and evil; the desirable and undesirable – but leaves the rooting out to God as arbiter and judge. Separating and categorising what *we might think* are the good from the bad has led to some rather destructive political philosophies. Perhaps there is a little bit of weed in each of us? But, are we to take no action and let evil and chaos trample over our efforts to assert what is good and right and true and honourable?

Perhaps the question I am most asked is: ‘Why doesn’t a holy and just God sort out the mess?’

We touched on this last week.

If God is God, why does he let accidents devastate lives and families, or let tyrants gain power and oppress entire nations, or tolerate criminals butchering the innocent, or allow fraudsters to spend the pensions and life savings of hard working people and seemingly get away with it?

Surely, God could *do* something?

However, spot interventions of the direct and immediate kind that people want God to enact would come at the price of our independence.

If God were to rule the world with this kind of directness, our every thought and action would be weighed, instantly judged, and if necessary punished, according to the scales of God's absolute holiness. I'm not sure who would be taking Sunday services, because it certainly wouldn't be me.

If the price of God swooping in and terminating a genocide was levied by rebuking and restraining every other evil impulse, including those we may be reluctant to acknowledge and surrender, would we still be prepared to pay that price?

We could not expect God to act on certain occasions then back off the rest of the time.

The parables in this section of Matthew's Gospel all carry the theme of waiting. Waiting is hard and frustrating, especially waiting for BT

to plant a phone line, as Edmund has recently discovered. None of us really like waiting, but it is in the waiting that we can learn the most profound truths about ourselves and others, or about certain situations.

The farmer waits for the harvest time, no doubt frustrated by watching the weeds poke their heads among the wheat.

Waiting is what the birds do as they watch the tiny mustard seed grow into a shrub big enough to accommodate their nests.

Waiting is what the woman baking the bread must do as she watches the effect of the leaven permeate the dough.

Waiting is part of the deal with the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' followers did not want to wait. They wanted the Kingdom to arrive in and with Jesus, as it evidently was, but also wanted it to arrive completely, all at once. No loose ends. Their timetable was what God needed to endorse.

Interesting, isn't it, to hear how the servants in the parable wanted to act? They wanted to root out the weeds straight away. The farmer restrains them. Life is never that simple. In their zeal to rid the fields of weeds they are likely to pull up some wheat as well.

Was Jesus referring to the revolutionary groups of his day? The political factions who were only too eager to take up arms against

pagans and compromised Jews? These 'servants' of God probably thought they were helping God to perform His will by acting themselves – assuming the role of religious vigilantes.

Jesus' whole campaign expresses things differently, explaining that the true Kingdom of God does not arrive in this way.

Patience is the keynote here. Not only the patience of the farmer and the servants who watch and wait, but the patience of God. God does not rejoice at the sight of a cornfield riddled with weeds, but neither does He think that a premature harvest and the danger of destroying wheat is a good idea.

We worship a compassionate God who wants the maximum number of people possible to enter into his Kingdom.

Jesus asked his followers, and asks us to live with the tension of a Kingdom that had arrived in and through Jesus, but which would come *in full* at an unspecified time in the future. Tom Wright refers to this as living with '*the here and not yet.*' The Kingdom of God will not land with a bang or a battle but will gradually burgeon into fruition like the slow growth of a plant or the steady leavening of a loaf.

This theology can be heard as a cop-out. People at the time of Jesus thought it was a cop-out and formed revolutionary groups to force God's hand. Yet, when we look at Jesus' ministry, it's impossible to say that God didn't care.

We who live on the other side of Calvary and Easter know that God did act suddenly and dramatically at that moment.

When we long for God to put the world to rights, we must remind ourselves that God has already done so. What we are awaiting is the full outworking of those events.

Furthermore, we wait with patience and hope, together with the whole creation. And hope will not disappoint us because we are not waiting in a darkened room, wondering if anyone will ever come with a torch to rescue us, but rather we wait like early risers who look at the grey dawn and know the sun has risen as they wait for the full solar glare of the noonday.

Let's Pray:

Abba! Father!

As we look out at the world
and consider the wheat and the weeds;
as we wait for redemption
may we have patience,
recognise the signs of the Kingdom,
and know your loving mercy in our hearts.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.