

Sermon for Sixth Sunday of Trinity – (Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19, Ps 86:11-17, Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

Last week the Gospel reading was all about the sower who experience difficulty because of various qualities of ground on which the seed fell – in this week's parable, the difficulties are not because of the ground this time, but because of an 'enemy' who comes at night and sows a common weed called dandelion. (It is useful to know at this point that this poisonous, weedy plant was very common, and grew wild and free in most places at that time)

It becomes *quite* puzzling when the owner tells the slaves not to remove the dandelion from the field – as would have been the usual practice – but to leave it where it is and let the wheat and weed grown together until harvest time.

This illustrates perfectly how both good and bad plants – the wheat and the dandelion – live side by side – and actually, isn't that the same for this complicated creation called humanity.

Take the fruit tree project on Beldham Road - On the one hand, we have three trees, lovingly dedicated to bring shade and fruit and joy to the community and on the other we have a person or persons who, for some unknown, yet completely unjustifiable reasons, thought it would be a good idea to pull them up and cut them down - just because they could..... Both actions – to create and to destroy – have been taken by a human hand. If we refer back to the wheat and the weed, it's not hard to work out which plant demonstrates which action.....

The life of Jesus teaches us to be careful about making too many assumptions about who is a weed and who is good wheat. Jesus reserved his strongest criticism for those who were considered really holy, and instead he treated with compassion the very weeds who were openly condemned. Jesus loved weeds and spent time with them, the thieves, prostitutes and the ones thought to be sinners.

This is difficult for us, however Jesus tells us not to rush to judgement, but rather to let it be, let it go, forgive. Evil is to be dealt with through letting it be, permitting it, forgiving it. This does not mean that there will not be a time when evil is dealt with, but that will be God's time, not ours, God's judgement and not ours. It is only God who looks and sees what is a human heart.

But we are warned by Jesus not to presume to know where we can find the good and the bad – not to be fooled by outward appearances which might lead us to destroy something which could upheave and destroy any seedling of good that might have been growing alongside.

And let's remember - Moses was a murderer, King David a murderer and an adulterer, the apostle Paul surely a murderer, he who looked on as Stephen was stoned to death and rounded the Christians up to be put to the sword.. Who would believe that such weeds could come to be so fruitful ?

Rather, we are to leave that judgment to God and concentrate on making sure our *own* lives are rooted in the righteous principles taught and demonstrated by Jesus. This includes being able to show compassion and mercy for those who seem to be strong contenders for being a definite dandelion – those whom we see as no-hopers where salvation and right living are concerned. In fact, Jesus' teachings demand that we rise to the overarching challenging task of being able to 'love the unlovely'.

By the very nature of us all having been created by a loving God are called to be good plants in a field – or a world – of brokenness so that, when added to the mix, we can infiltrate the weeds and, by the power of the Holy Spirit become strong enough to root out even the toughest dandelion so that, in time, we all become united in Christ. But *we must* let God set the pace; the seed grows in time and the good plant wins out in the end.

This story is about patience and grace, about God giving time. We might become frustrated and wanting God to act more quickly to address the evil and suffering in the world but we must trust that God is working out his purpose.

Coming back to our own story, I wonder what weed has entwined itself so chokingly around the hearts of those who cut down the trees, stifling all sense of unity and respect, There is such a thin line between feeling compassion and sadness for a human being that has been damaged, and anger and judgment for the same human being who expresses its damage through acts of destruction towards other people, places and things.....

And - of course – sadly, this cycle of human self-destruction is not limited to the grounds of a little church in a suburban parish. Everywhere we look these days, we see news both nationally and internationally of famine, war, injustice and human brokenness.....

Well, it seems to me that we have just arrived at a picture of a world crying out for mercy, compassion and salvation – even if it is a world which doesn't fully know it....

Paul's letter to the Romans is encouraging when it reminds us to live life in the Spirit of Jesus – as a 'good plant' – a life lived in hope. He talks of a freedom within a restored creation – the weeds are banished as the wheat thrives and grows strong. We don't have to expel those who are blinded by ignorance and neither do we have to let the weeds of our own character become a 'bondage of decay'.

Rather, we should look within ourselves to grow spiritually into the people of God we are called to be. Through Christ, we have the capacity to live a life of freedom, not from the material world in all its ups and downs, but with the understanding that we are part of that restored creation, that we are made in the image and likeness of God, here and now.

What Paul is saying is that 'believers are being saved, not from creation *but with creation*. Brokenness, within the world and within ourselves, is a question of being separated from God's love. Restoration for Paul, as in the parable today, comes when, in patience and in hope, we see the healthy wheat outgrowing the weeds.

So in summary, it seems as if Jesus is telling us that the wheat and the weed must grow together so as not to disturb any goodness that is taking root, and that we can trust a loving and merciful Father who, in the end, will ensure that, somehow, all the evil properties of the bad plant will be weeded out and burnt. Patience and unseen hope are the keys to this parable...

But that's not all - because of God's abundant gift of making use of even the worst humanity has to offer, the good news is that even the bound up bundle of weeds that wait to be burned by the reapers can sometimes bear fruit in God's plan. It is possible that through God's merciful and forgiving Spirit, a choking weed can itself be choked and destroyed to reveal the good, strong and healthy plant that was always there in the beginning. Nothing in God's world is beyond saving.

Isn't it wonderful to know that our compassionate and loving God, through the teachings and ministry, and the death and resurrection of Jesus, encourages us to be patient and merciful and hopeful of a brighter tomorrow, even as he is ever patient and merciful and hopeful for us, no matter how unlovely we appear to be.

So finally, I would encourage you, as a focus for quiet times this week –to revisit our readings today that tell us we can wait in hope that as part of the whole creation 'groaning in labour pains', we can wait expectantly to be set free from the weeds of 'bondage and decay' that stifle our own peace and usefulness, so that we can 'obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' and so become the transforming agents for the peace and wellbeing of those around us, in our communities and beyond. For as Paul says, 'we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.' Amen