

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 19th July 2020

Sunday Worship

With Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you are well. This week, our focus will be on Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 where Jesus tells another seed-related parable, again with an explanation. Let us worship God together.

Call to worship

'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.
The field is the world,
and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.'

We are the people of the kingdom.
Come now to worship the Son of Man.
Come seeking new understanding
of all that he has done for us,
and of all that we are called to do
for the building of the kingdom.

Amen.

A gathering prayer

Lord, we gather and we pause
to think about your world:
such a beautiful place.
We want everything to be perfect,
but we accept it is far from that.
So, bring us together to learn from you
how to be your presence in the world,
how to create a right environment
and be fruitful for you in all we do.
Keep us always watchful and prayerful.

Amen.

Hymn: Praise and Thanksgiving

Praise and thanksgiving,
Father, we offer,
for all things living
you have made good;
harvest of sown fields,
fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields,
blossom and wood.

Lord, bless the labour
we bring to serve you,
that with our neighbour
we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling,
we would work with you;
harvesting, milling,
for daily bread.

Father, providing
 food for your children,
 your wisdom guiding
 teaches us share
 one with another,
 so that, rejoicing,
 sister and brother
 may know your care.

Then will your blessing
 reach every people;
 each one confessing
 your gracious hand:
 when you are reigning
 no one will hunger,
 your love sustaining
 fruitful the land.

A.F. Bayly (1904-84)

A prayer of confession

Lord, I confess to you this morning
 that I'm not very patient with the weeds in my life.
 I try to yank them out, without thinking of any harm that may cause,
 to me or others.
 Sometimes, I'm so frightened that those tangles will overcome me
 that I try to ignore them, pretending they're not there.

Please forgive me, Lord,
 and help me to trust you to show me your way. **Amen.**

Because of God's great grace and goodness
 we are lovingly and wonderfully redeemed and restored.
 All praise and thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Bible Reading: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

²⁴ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸ He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹ But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears^[a] listen!

Reflection

In today's reading from the Gospel, Matthew's Jesus offers another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...' Here, he is going to teach us on an aspect of the 'kingdom of heaven' (Mark and Luke use 'kingdom of God'). Just as in last week's Gospel reading, we have the agricultural model of sowing. The householder's servants have prepared the ground and ploughed in the 'good seed'. But weeds, most probably the poisonous darnel, also grow in the field. This weed looks very similar; it's difficult to distinguish from wheat. We are told how we are to account for the presence of darnel: it is attributed to the 'enemy', but as we know, this parable is a literary device for understanding an aspect of the kingdom and so we probably should not explore every detail too literally. Rather, here we have a symbolic conflict between good and evil. Should the weeds be pulled out before they take over? Well, no, because this would mean that the wheat is trampled into the ground before it is ready and ripe. But when the harvest is gathered, then a separation will be made. The wheat will be gathered to feed the household, but the weeds will be collected and burnt - darnel was used for household fuel.

Mostly, we may understand this parable as a development of the parable of the sower: here, the seed that flourishes is also at risk of being choked by the weeds. Yet there is a promise that the weeds will not overcome the wheat, and that the weeds will come to nothing – but not yet. As with the sower last week, this parable is treated by Matthew as an allegory with an allegorical interpretation, where all the details in the parable are said to represent something else. However, all the details in the explanation of this week's parable seems too tidy to be true and most scholars are certain that it did not come from Jesus himself. The interpretation is full of Matthew's language, style and theology, and so even if some earlier form of the parable did originate with Jesus, its interpretation is almost certainly Matthew's.

Matthew's interpretation understands the parable as an allegorical portrayal of 'end time' judgement. His perspective is eschatological and apocalyptic and he hopes to affect the present conduct of the believers with his interpretation. He no doubt writes to address a genuine issue, in his own time, much later than the ministry of Jesus, when the church had attracted a wide range of people with mixed motivations and variable levels of commitment. Although we only know so much about the early church in Matthew's time, we do know that Church discipline was often a debated issue. There were some severe types who believed that the church should only include very serious and completely committed Christians and who favoured a purging of any who fell short of this strict standard. Their opponents believed that the church should be far more gracious, tolerant and accepting of human weaknesses. The interpretation makes it clear what Matthew's view on the matter was. To be too quick to weed out those perceived as not being committed enough would only lead to mistakes being made with God's people. They should leave all judgement to God, he will sort everything out in the end. And if God can put up with the weeds until then, so should they. Perhaps we might add, 'so should we!'

This is not to say that, just because we're not going to start doing the allegorical weeding, that we are somehow called to be passive in the face of evil. There is no divine command to ignore injustice in our world or wrong within the church within Mathew's understanding. Rather, there is an honest, realistic acceptance that servants don't have the ability to deal with every weed and that sometimes pulling them up can do more harm than good. We have to be realistic! We may still be hopeful though. The parable includes a promise that, in God's great wisdom, the weeds will ultimately be destroyed. As New Testament Scholar M. Eugene-Boring writes, the parable tells us that 'evil is temporary, only the good endures.' He continues to clearly explain where this parable leaves us: 'The parable leads, finally, then, to a place of joy and hope. We live in an imperfect world and no human effort can eradicate that fact. But that was never our job anyway. We are given the task of living as faithfully and as obediently as possible, confident that the harvest is sure.' Amen.

A personal prayer

The field is the world.

Lord, I live in a tiny patch of your world but it is still my field to serve you.

I pray that I will give my time and gifts to you and yours in whatever way I can.

Your kingdom come, O Lord.

Amen.

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
 whose trust, ever child-like, no cares could destroy,
 be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
 your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
 whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
 be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
 your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
 your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
 be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
 your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
 whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
 be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
 your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Jan Struther (1901-53)

Our prayers of intercession

Lord God, we pray for our world and its people.
 So many different cultures, colours, languages
 – but we are all your children, all special in our own right.
 Whatever our gender, race, colour or creed, we all belong to you.
We all need your love.

We pray that we might learn to live in harmony with each other,
 to recognise that even someone halfway around the world is still
 our neighbour in your sight. Far or near, we all belong to you.
We all need your love.

With today's technology we have access to news from afar,
 almost before it happens. Help us not to become blasé about
 the situations we see, but to pray and care faithfully for all concerned.
 In war or peace, we all belong to you.
We all need your love.

We pray for those near and dear to us: protect them, wrap them
 in your loving arms, and in sorrow and in joy, be with them.
 Near or far, we all belong to you.
 We pray for Margaret Widdowson who is unwell in hospital.
 We pray for Joan Cross as she faces challenges with her health.
 We give thanks for the life of Sybil Nicholls
 and we pray for her son and all her family at this time of loss.

A moment of quiet for your own prayers for our broken world and those in need.

**We all need your love.
 Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

We pray together with confidence, as Jesus taught us:

Our Father,
 who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name;
 thy kingdom come;
 thy will be done;
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread,
 and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 Lead us not into temptation;
 but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom,
 the power and the glory,
 for ever and ever. Amen.

A sending out prayer

Lord, thank you that we have been able
 to spend time with you today.
 We have felt ourselves grow stronger
 as we have been blessed with your presence.
 Send us out to spread your love,
 in your precious name.
Amen.

The Blessing

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 be upon us all, and those we love, today and always, **Amen.**

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
 be with us all,
 for evermore.
 Amen.**

May God bless you all richly,
 With our love and best wishes to you and your families,

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