

Sermon for 23.7.17

In today's gospel passage we continue with chapter 13 of Matthew's gospel which proclaims the parables of the kingdom.

Today's parable is the one about the weeds and the wheat. This parable is found only in the gospel of Matthew and it uses the experience of the sower (the son of man) to illustrate an aspect of the Kingdom.

As we hear in the explanation to the disciples, the son of man, which is one way Jesus identified himself, is the sower who sows good seed. The field is the world – and the bad seed that is also present is sown by the devil. The main thrust of the parable is that in the field, there is a mixed body of saints and sinners until the final sifting by God's agents.

On one level, the teaching encourages patience, tolerance, and forbearance. It encourages us to walk patiently with God, rather than seeking to go it alone and force events to come to a head - for seeking to force outcomes, as the parable warns, can uproot the goodness that is also present, and no one should usurp divine judgement.

"In gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest time" (Matthew 13.28)

The explanation of the parable about the end time, is understood by some theologians to be an appeal by Matthew to the early church to realise that they could not distinguish between the good and evil in the church, and that God who was at work would ultimately do the sifting.

In the first reading Isaiah restates the argument from prophecy in support of the pre-eminence and incomparability of the Lord. *Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any God besides me? There is no other rock: I know not one. (Isaiah 44.6-8)*

Taken as a whole Matthew's view in the parable of the weeds and wheat, urges trust in God the Rock of all, in preparation for the judgment, and protects the community from charges of hypocrisy.

Of course such interpretation begs the question: so then what are we to do, about the evil in our midst. Is our response only to be passive resistance? Such a question takes us to a different level of truth and verse 7 in the parable of the sower is helpful here. It states that weeds left unchecked can indeed choke the wheat. Hence, regarding the presence of evil, there needs to be some just response, if not elimination.

There is a balance therefore to be maintained, through tolerance, patience and forbearance for the church which needs constant reformation and positive action in every age, for the world in any age of corruption, and for the individual in their ongoing growth into wholeness.

Now in Paul's letter to the Romans, we hear again about living in the Spirit.

Last week I touched on life in the Spirit through the contemplative way - as a time of stillness and silence waiting upon God. I believe this finds its relevance again here today in the parable of the weeds and wheat.

I thought today I would say a little more about living in the spirit and Paul's teaching that has over time been taken in a literal sense and understood fundamentally as some out of body experience. Something like you might see in the old TV series, The Outer Limits, or the X Files or The Twilight Zone. It has been over time an accepted belief that the body was of course, sinful and earth bound, whereas the Spirit was refined and close to God. Many in the church, held and taught this view.

Now there is no doubt that Paul contrasts life in the spirit and life in the flesh in his writings in Romans. Paul however does not think in dualistic or separate terms of a spirit over body, but rather that when the body acts on its own without integration with the Holy Spirit within, sin can take hold. What I believe Paul is pleading for in his writings, is integrated wholeness of Body, Mind and Spirit.

And we remember that it is Paul who wrote in 1 Corinthians: "Do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have received from **God**?"

Living in the Spirit therefore is not some out of body experience. It is not some airy fairy abstract concept. It is rather a life in acceptance that the Holy Spirit is in reality the manifestation of the Father's presence, through the Risen Lord ever present in our lives.

Living in the Spirit is about living intimately with God, the Rock, the first and the last, in such a way that we can address God as a loving parent as Abba! Father.

It is the way of life we are called into so as to accept the mystery of the kingdom of God on Earth on every level - for knowledge may take us to the threshold of God, but only love in the Spirit of the Trinity, enables us to enter into the mystery.

The Lord be with you.