

11/10/20: Podcast talk: Harvest: Matthew 13 v24-30

Hello

You could say that today's reading, from Matthew chapter thirteen, has the whole Bible in one parable: everything is good, then things go wrong, but God promises it will all be put right again in the end.

To begin with, I want to point out what the parable does not say: Jesus doesn't say that some of us are weeds and always will be, and that some other people are perfect ears of wheat. One of God's gifts of love to us is that we all have a choice about how we live our life, and one of God's challenges is that nobody's perfect

In the early days of the Methodist Church, John Wesley had a saying that was known as "The Four Alls", which was a reminder of a lot of important things about us and God, put into easy to remember words:

"All *need* to be saved", so nobody should think they are already a perfect example of humanity

"All *can* be saved", so nobody should be made to feel they are beyond God's love and grace

"All can *know* they are saved", so nobody should worry that having come to faith, God will not welcome them with open arms

"All can be saved to the uttermost", so none of us should feel that there is anything about us that will not eventually be healed and made whole by God's goodness and kindness.

We can all make choices, and each day is a new chance to choose, to *be* kind, and to *do* good

So, in the parable, the point is about patience, and about wisdom and faith

Jesus sets the scene: a householder sows good seed in a field. This is a reminder of Creation, and of all we celebrate and give thanks for at harvest time. When God had created all that there is, God saw that it was good, and it was all made to be good and fully good. It's a reminder too that Jesus said "I have come that you may have life in all its fullness"

But...(there's always a "but" in a good story!), things go wrong, while everyone's asleep. It's worth noticing it's while everyone's asleep that things go wrong. Goodness: everything being as it should be, needs attention and protection. So, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds in among the wheat.

The field workers are upset, and come to the householder asking "Where did these weeds come from? Do you want us to go and gather them?" They want to go and put it all right, but the householder tells them not to, pulling up the weeds now will spoil the harvest itself.

History is full of what happens when we try to bring about our idea of perfection by force, maybe our own experience is too: whether that's in the family, with an overbearing parent; at work, with a boss with an attitude of "it's my way, or the highway!"; in religion, politics and economics, with all the awful wars and persecutions

Instead of immediate perfection by force, God calls us to patience, to waiting, when we want everything to be right, and all the problems to be gone.

So many of us feel the impatience, perhaps especially now, with the virus, and with climate change and all the destruction they both bring. We might well find ourselves praying “God please put things right” but we can’t just wish it away, any more than we can with earthquakes, with bad weather, with disease and ill health, or any of all the other difficulties we might live with every day

This is not the same as not caring, I’m not talking about resignation and cynicism. Weeds *are* weeds, and it doesn’t do any good pretending they are flowers.

God calls us to faith, and to trust. Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, who promised to be with us always, is with us in our struggles, and God will put things right in the end

Humans are problem-solvers, we see trouble and try to fix it. That’s how we have made so much of everyday life so much easier and better for us now than it has been in the past: with medicine, and human rights, and electronics, and justice, and engineering, and international peacemaking. In the parable, the workers are worried about the weeds, but most of the field is still wheat. It’s easy to see only the difficulties, and miss the goodness and the blessings, and there are more than enough blessings in life for us to be able to give thanks, as we do today at Harvest, not ignoring difficulties, or pretending life is fine, but not letting the bad dominate, not letting the trouble of life have the last word.

Jesus’ own answer to this imperfection of life, to the real mess of the world, was His selfless love and kindness, and His courageous challenge of truth and justice - and where it led for Him was to crucifixion, as He faced the worst the

world could do to Him, and then to His resurrection, to God having the final word, of life, and life in all its fullness, and that the greatest thing is love, greater even than death.

We can recognise the weeds, and be kind with each other as we face the troubles of life, and at the same time, we can rejoice in the wheat, in the good things of life which speak of God's love, the love which can give us courage to keep on, and we can remind each other to trust the Harvester, that God's timing is right and God wants the harvest to be as full as it can be.