



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Sunday 11.00 Eucharist 19th July 2020

Romans 8:12-25 Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

When you get to my great age, you start remembering things from your childhood better than why you just walked into that room, and what it was you were looking for.

Children's television was quite memorable in the sixties and seventies and I believe, had remakes later on. Programmes like *The Magic Roundabout*, *Andy Pandy*, and *Bill and Ben the Flowerpot men*. Can anyone remember *Bill and Ben's* little sidekick who, in the original version, was only ever allowed to say one word? *Little Weed*. All she ever said was *Weed* in a high pitch, squeaky voice.

I don't think it was a psychedelic reference, but you never know with things of that period.

People used to obliterate weeds with high strength chemicals but in these more ecological days our relationship with weeds is more nuanced. What actually IS a weed? Rather than a nuisance, it's actually just a plant considered undesirable in a particular location.

The moss that my darling husband so ferociously removes from the lawn, would no doubt be lovely in a rock garden. Wild flower areas can be beautiful, and to see a wild poppy grow out of a paving stone always gives me joy. When something unsuspected grows in our little garden, apart from moss, it can be quite fun to let it grow to full height to see what it is going to be, and whether it should stay or go.

When Jesus told the parable we heard today about today, it wasn't just about whether plants were pretty or not.

The weed that the farmer's enemy sowed in his wheat field was *Darnel*, a plant that looks just like wheat, and in some translations is called *tares*.

When they first grew, the wheat and the *Darnel* looked exactly the same, but whereas the wheat would be ground for flour, the *Darnel* seed was poisonous because it harboured a fungus that contained poisonous *ergot*;

this poison could cause drowsiness and even death. It wasn't until the ear was ripe that you could tell the difference – and if you pulled out the *darnel* weed from the field, you risked pulling out the precious wheat too. So, the farmer said *Wait*.

It is sometimes said that this parable is about the problem of evil. Just as the darnel weed sowed by the enemy, disguises itself as wheat, so too can people or institutions appear good but turn out very bad. You sometimes see that in a plot line in a film, a person appears friendly but then, right at the end, turns out to be the villain. We live in a world that is an unavoidable mixture of good and bad. Though we long for the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God in our World, we have to wait until the day when Christ returns as Judge and Redeemer. That is not to say we should not fight against evil, but that ultimately we have to accept that it will always be part of our world, and part of our own human hearts until that day.

The Russian writer Solzhenitsyn said this 'The line between good and evil does not run between nations, states, political parties, religions and people, but between every human heart'. Human nature is a complex thing. We all have something of the wheat and the weed about us. And it can be difficult to discern in people and situations what the good is and what the bad is.

What today's gospel tells us is that when Jesus comes again, all that is weed-like in us will be got rid of, all that is evil in the world will be chucked out. The good stuff will be harvested and celebrated. The bad stuff will never again come back. There will be judgement, but Jesus will be the judge, not us. That doesn't stop us from weeding the garden when we work out what the weeds are. It doesn't stop us wanting our council workers to weed our streets and parks which would be jungles if they didn't. It doesn't stop us speaking out when we see wrong in our world, or working for the Kingdom here and now.

But what it does tell us is that life is never going to be simple, there is going to be conflict and confusion, but this world isn't the last word. Our home as Christians is ultimately beyond this life in heaven with Jesus, the angels, and the whole people of God, which is why we don't need to be afraid of death.

And I believe that even though our God is a holy God who will remove sin and evil, he constantly offers to human beings the chance to receive his love and forgiveness, to be a child of the kingdom however poisonous they may have become. Think of St Paul, think of the thief crucified next to Christ.

God the farmer, as we heard last week, constantly sows the good seed even into the hearts of sinful people, people like us. And he will sort and sift us.

I end with some words of a harvest hymn we sadly won't be able to sing together later in the year, but perhaps we can all sing separately in the bath or the shower.

*All the world is God's own field, fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown, unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.*

*For the Lord our God shall come, and shall take His harvest home;
From His field shall in that day, all offenses purge away,
Giving angels charge at last, in the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store in His garner evermore.*