

Last week we considered the Parable of The Sower. The sermon reminded us of the abundant faithfulness of God in both the diversity of creation and in the generosity of his love for us. In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus uses another parable to describe the types of plants that may grow from the seeds sown in our world.

Jesus describes how everything that God's sows is inherently good. However, seeds are spread into a landscape where other species (strewn by the evildoer) are also able to grow. Jesus describes the development of two species of plant: Wheat (a wholesome and useful grain) and another which depending on the translation, is described as a Weed, Tare, Darnel or Zizanion. He then describes the plants as representing two types of people facing the end times. They will be either be destined for the Kingdom of Heaven or face a future in a fiery Hell. This raises the question of how we might we discern who is to meet which fate. Before considering how people might fare, let's consider the nature of the plant species Jesus describes.

As seeds and young plants, Wheat and Tares look similar. After germinating develop green stems and an apparent head of grain. However, it is only in the later stages of growth, just before the harvest that the true nature of the crops become clear. As the harvest approaches, the weight of the grain in a wheat plant causes its grain head to bend over ready for harvest. By this time tares are much easier to spot. Their thinner stems and light-weight seed heads, with toxic contents continues their upward journey oblivious to the fiery fate awaiting them after harvesting and threshing. This visual image of the final days before the harvest is helpful in describing those of faith who will bow down before God in contrast to those who may stand out proudly in the world unaware of their plight or need for God.

This raises a second question which is how are we to know whether a person might be judged as more like wheat or a weed?

As humans we all have the potential to be like both plants. A "wheatlike" life would be fruitful and filled with The Spirit. It would involve walking closely with God and spending time and effort building a relationship with him. It is only by knowing of the nature of God and our need to bow down before him, that we might begin to resemble wheat. By contrast, the person who is a "tare" might look good in the crowd; but be unable or unwilling to do what is right when tested by God or circumstances.

Given our possession of free-will and our potential to act in a variety of ways depending on our context and circumstances it is perhaps useful to remember that we are all potentially both wheat and tare. With a humbler attitude to our own importance we might see the ways in which God longs for us all to grow. As our loving heavenly father, he is willing to give us the time, space, and love that we need to fulfil his wishes for our lives. Unlike seeds whose destiny is determined by species; people have choices over the direction their life will take and a God who is infinitely patient with us as we discern his will.

Given our ability to fall short of the mark, we are left with a third question, which is at what point might it be reasonable for us to be judged? In verses 28 and 29, asked by the servant if they should try and weed out the tares, Jesus is clear that to do so would risk the life of the wheat and the tare. Instead he instructs that it is best for both species to be left until the harvest.

This is perhaps a reminder for us to allow time for God to work his purposes out. We all need time to grow and change as we discern God's will for our lives. We need also to allow time for others to complete their journeys under God's guidance and in God's time. Any attempt by us to judge who is good enough or worthy of criticism says more about us than them. If we can willingly receive God's abundant generosity, we also ought to respond by reflecting God's graciousness in our dealings with others.

As Christians, we are called to show patience with and tolerance of others, even those we disapprove of or find difficult. We must accept that others may take longer to notice and act upon the gracious gifts that God offers. Our job is not put ourselves in the place of God and judge. We must not worship the false idols of this world (such as status, money, power, and unrealistic physical appearance) Rather, we are to live alongside all varieties of people and encourage them to grow in God's image. Through our words and actions, we are to support the growth of humankind aiming for fruitful lives worthy of living in communion with God in this world and the next.

Amen.