

**Sunday 17 July 2011**

**Trinity 4 Ray Slade**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Matthew 13 24-30, 36-43 (p926)**

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

<sup>27</sup> “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

<sup>28</sup> “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

<sup>29</sup> “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

**Go to v 36.** <sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

<sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

<sup>40</sup> “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Today we have the parable of the weeds. One of the lesser known parables. Somehow it gets lost because of the apparent similarity to the much better known parable of the sower. But it is not the same. In the sower we have good seed falling on 4 kinds of ground, 3 not conducive to growth. In today's weeds parable there is only one kind of soil, good soil, but 2 kinds of seed, good and bad.

In fact it is one of a set of 7 so called 'parables of the kingdom'. All in Matt 13.

- Sower
- Weeds
- Mustard seed
- Yeast
- Hidden treasure
- Pearl
- Drag net

It is worth noting that when these parables are taken singly we get only a partial image of the kingdom. They start 'the kingdom is like'. Then each develops one or two aspects; none is the complete story but together, and importantly together with other words of Jesus, they give a pretty full and clear picture.

**Do read the whole of Matt 13 slowly several times later.**

(Incidentally sometimes I hear of people who say they don't have a modern readable Bible at home. 'The words of life'! Get one for not much more than a fiver – a bottle of wine. In fact have a word after and I'll sort you one out – for now!! As long as you promise to read it that is.)

So let's take a look at it and try to figure out how Jesus' words might help us today.

At first sight it's simple enough. Good seed is sown and all is well. Then **at dead of night** an enemy appears and secretly makes an additional sowing of weeds.

Good and bad grow together undisturbed but **at the point of sprouting** the difference becomes apparent. The owner takes the decision not to try to separate at this point as more harm will be done than good. No they are to go **to harvest**, be harvested then the separation will happen. The wheat (apparently not much the worse) will be gathered and put in the barn. But before that weeds will be collected **for burning**

All of this was known in the ancient world. The weeds (bearded darnel or tares, Latin name *Lolium temulentum*) do indeed look identical to wheat prior to sprouting. They are poisonous and mildly narcotic. Nasty stuff! The roots do indeed intermingle making separation hazardous to the wheat if done at an early stage. Darnel was indeed gathered for burning as fuel. Amazingly this deliberate sowing of weeds into another man's field was also a known crime in **Roman law** usually as an act of revenge, and sanctions were laid down.

So what was the purpose of this parable? What does it tell us about the kingdom? The explanation comes in v 24 to 30. First Jesus expounds the analogy by giving a one to one line up of the 7 key players.

<sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the **Son of Man**.<sup>38</sup> The field is the **world**, and the good seed stands for the **people of the kingdom**. The weeds are the **people of the evil one**,<sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the **devil**. The harvest is the **end of the age**, and the harvesters are **angels**.

He then goes on to tell us, in very graphic terms, its meaning.

<sup>40</sup> “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, **so it will be at the end of the age**.<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.<sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will **shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father**. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

What are we to make of all this? What does it say to us, today?

It seems to me that there are 2 core themes that weave their way through Jesus’ words a bit like the two helixes of DNA they give us the genetic code of the parable. First we see a clear indication that there is to be **a final sorting out, a final judgement, a final dealing with evil, and a final destination for all of humanity**. But we also detect a message that in the interim we are to be **patient**, if you like we are to ‘**let God be God**’. Not to be judgemental of others, to trust him. So a message of **judgement** intertwined with a call to **patience**.

Patience can be difficult. We are readily confused by things that happen. Why do evil people seem to prosper, to get away with it? Why on the other hand do such bad things happen to such good people? Why has the world waited 2000 years for this ultimate justice?

We are **to be patient, to let God be God**, confident that, in the fullness of time He will root out evil and provide for his followers that place where they will **shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father**. A wonderful promise of a very sure hope, a hope we can rely upon.

That’s the core but note we **mustn’t push** the parable analogy beyond that. It is a partial picture to be read in the light of the rest of Jesus’ teaching.

For example; the wheat just grows alongside the weeds. But this does not imply that Christians just hang around doing nothing except 'enjoy God's love' in a world of non believers.. There's more to it than that. Earlier in Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells us to be **'salt and light'** in the world, to make a real difference in our community. We are to be like the Good Samaritan' **generously helping** those around us. We are to fight against **injustice perhaps at personal cost.**

No this is not a passive 'I'm alright Jack' kind of patience. In LGL language we are to be disciples who **'transform the communities'** in which we live and move and work. We must read the parable in the light of the rest of our Lord's teaching.

Again in the parable we see the **'good seed'** is sown by the **Son**, the **'weeds'** by the **devil**, almost as though there is **no choice** in the matter for either party. But again that is a simplification for the purposes of the image, the story. We must again look at the fuller teachings of scripture.

Later in Matthew's Gospel Jesus commands us to go into the world and **make disciples.** He presents folk with a **Gospel choice** upon which they can decide for themselves. Paul in Timothy tells us that **'God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth'** 1 Tim 2 v 4. In other words there is **a choice** presented to people to be, on the one hand, **disciples** who will **shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.** Or to be those who face a different destiny. The parable is quite clear about that.

And so patience, letting God be God, is intertwined with judgement in this parable of Jesus. We have before us a choice. The positive, life giving choice is to be actively a disciple, committed to the ways of Christ, to serving Him, to growing in deeper knowledge of him. To be **the good seed that stands for the people of the kingdom.**

And that applies just as much today as it did 2000 years ago and for whatever further period God chooses.

Finally if you want to talk this through any further or have this little booklet just say the word. You can take the booklet and we can arrange to chat it over. My tel and email are on PN.