

Reflection - Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
23/07/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 28: 10-19a Jacob's Dream at Bethel
All people will be blessed through him

Psalms 139: 1-11, 23,24 God is All Knowing and Ever Present

Romans 8: 12-25 By the Spirit we have hope for Future Glory

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43 Jesus tells the parable of the weeds in the wheat fields

Introduction

Last week we looked at the parable of the four soils, and we looked at how the path represents people unwilling to respond to Jesus, the rocky soil represented those who accepted Jesus but wither away, the weedy soil represents those who accept Jesus but are choked out of producing anything, and the good soil represents those who grow in the Good News of Jesus and bear fruit.

Today we have another parable, again using the imagery of wheat growing in the field, but this time we are encouraged to envisage ourselves as the seeds and not the soil.

The emphasis is also different. Whilst last week's focus was on how people respond differently to Jesus, this week's parable simply focuses on what happens to those who accept Jesus, and what happens to those who reject Jesus.

So let us explore today's parable and the consequences for being either the wheat seeds or the weed seeds, and what it might mean for us, both into the future, but also in the here and now.

Parable Overview

We begin with an overview of the Parable and its explanation.

Jesus begins with, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to ..."

Jesus was trying to help those he was speaking to at the time, but also help us who are hearing these parables today, to know what living in "God's Kingdom", or under "God's Rule" will be like. Today we hear about "Good Seed" and "Weed Seed".

The "Good Seed" represents those who are planted by Jesus, and the "Weed Seed" represents those who are planted by the devil. Both the wheat and the weeds will grow together, until the harvest. At the harvest, the weeds will be burned, and the wheat will be gathered into the barn.

The "Good Seed" are those who choose to accept and follow Jesus, and the "Weed Seed" are those who reject Jesus. Both seeds are allowed to grow together, that is, good and evil will co-exist, until the "end of the age", when Jesus will return. Those who reject Jesus will be thrown aside into the fire, and those who accept Jesus will be drawn into God's Kingdom and shine like the sun.

Consequences - Future

So, as we hear this parable today, let us explore what it tells us about the future.

The parable talks about the harvest, as an event that will happen in the future. The two outcomes in the parable are quite clear. The weeds will be burned, and the wheat will go into the barn.

It is a pretty stark contrast.

The weeds represent those who are planted by the enemy, who is the devil. And being burned in the fire represents going to hell. We hear those terrible words used a number of times in Matthew's gospel, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth". I'm not sure what you think of when you hear those words, but it doesn't sound like anything good to me.

If we believe what Jesus is telling us in today's parable, about what the "Kingdom of heaven" is like, then it is pretty sobering stuff. Jesus is letting us know that, he will come again, at the "end of the age", and if we have not accepted Jesus and sought to follow Jesus in our lives, we will be cut off from God for all eternity.

As bad as "weeping and gnashing of teeth" sounds, I can't think of anything worse than being cut off from God forever. But that is only the story of the weeds.

The wheat represents those who are placed in the field by Jesus himself. At the harvest they will be collected and go into the barn. This is how Jesus describes them, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

If we accept Jesus and seek to follow Jesus in our lives, then we can trust that no matter what happens in the "here and now" we are secure in God's love, and that ultimately God's peace will prevail in our lives for all eternity.

From this parable the consequences for the future are made very clear. Those who reject Jesus, are actually rejecting God, and will ultimately be cut off from God. Those who accept Jesus and seek to follow Jesus in their lives, can know that they are secure in God's love for eternity.

For me this seems so clear, and yet I believe many people I know will probably be cut off from God for all eternity, because they don't really realize what they are rejecting when they reject Jesus.

This is a great tragedy, and that is why as Christians we are called to share the "Good News" of Jesus with those around us. The only thing we may be able to do for some people we know is to pray, and if that is the case for you, I urge you not to stop praying for those you may know, who are yet to accept Jesus into their lives.

Consequences – Here and Now

This parable tells us about what will happen when Jesus returns, at the end of the age, but what about the here and now?

We hear this in the parable,

“Then do you want us to go and gather them?”²⁹ But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

We hear how the master allows the wheat and the weeds co-exist.

This might seem like adding to the parable, but many plants, when young, look the same. Jesus is saying that if there is an attempt to remove weeds before it is time then some wheat may also be destroyed.

So, if we bring the parable back into the “here and now”, it makes a lot of sense of the world we see around us. We don’t have to look far to see people doing good and helping others, and we don’t have to look far to see people doing bad things and hurting others. We can see it on a global scale, with good done through world aid programmes and with the evil being done in wars, and if we really think about it, we can see it within our own lives.

It can be very frustrating, and for some, it is a great challenge to their faith, as they struggle to believe in a good God, when so much evil happens in the world.

As Christians I believe from this parable, that God’s ultimate timing is perfect, even though we may never fully understand it in this life.

The challenge for us in the “here and now” is that we are called to have patience.

Have you ever heard someone say, “Patience is a virtue”. I believe it is and I believe it is a virtue that God will give to us, if we sincerely ask God for it.

To live lives as followers of Jesus we have to know and accept that things may not always be the way that we might want them to be. We have to be patient and trust God. We have to live our lives striving to follow Jesus and to do good, knowing that those who oppose us, or perpetrate injustices against us, may never fully face the consequences of their bad behaviour in this life.

From this parable we know that whilst ultimately, we are secure in God’s love, through Jesus, evil still exists in the world, and will not fully be eradicated until Jesus comes again.

Conclusion

From today's parable we learn many things.

We learn that when Jesus returns, those who have accepted and trust Jesus will be secure in God's love, but those who reject Jesus will be cut off from God forever.

We learn that before Jesus returns good and evil will co-exist, but that we should continue to strive for the good because following Jesus keeps us secure in God's presence. We also learn that to live in this dichotomy will require a great deal of patience.

I pray that we will all continue to strive to live as disciples of Jesus, that we will be given the skills and abilities required to be patient, and to continue to share the wonderful hope we have in Jesus, so that we might help as many as possible around us to come to accept and follow Jesus, in their lives. So that they too, will be secure in God's love, for all eternity.

Amen.