

Sermon on Matthew 13 - the weeds trinity 6 2020

May I speak in the name of that Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen, please sit down.

At the end of May and in early June, as the weather was good, our routine evening walk from our house on Clothall Common was the airfield route, that is, up the bank, across the bridge over the bypass and along the footpath by the model flying club.

Every evening we were treated to the most amazing sight, it start with just a few large white Michaelmas daisies, then, every evening more and more until there was a whole swathe of pure white. Absolutely beautiful, every evening it took my breath away. It was one of those occasions when a photo cannot do it justice, you had to see it in person.

A closer inspection revealed not just the white flowers but others, yellow, pink and purple and among them all, bees buzzing and lots of butterflies, the area was teeming with insects going about their business. I have never seen such a large field of wild flowers before, did the farmer plant it or was it a truly wild display? A field full of 'weeds'? Or a crop sown on purpose?

In our Gospel reading today Jesus continues his gardening theme with the parable of the weeds, just before this, he was talking about the sower and his seeds and the good soil and just after this parable he speaks of the tiny mustard seed growing into a tree large enough to hold the birds of the sky. But today it is the turn of the weeds.

I don't know about you but when I normally think of weeds I think of plants that are not valued, plants with vigorous growth, plants that choke other plants. Plants that take over....

I preached on this passage three years ago and at the time researched what plants Jesus might have been thinking about. Apologies if you remember this from then, but in case, like me, you had forgotten here it is again!

It is likely that when he speaks of weeds here, in this parable, that Jesus is referring to the plant known as darnel. This plant is virtually indistinguishable from wheat until it matures, it is also poisonous. Both plants are lush green and can be distinguished only when they mature and produce ears: Wheat ears are large and golden, while darnel ears are small and grey.

When darnel is ground into flour, baked in bread, and consumed while hot, I have been told that the eater may experience symptoms similar to drunkenness, including trembling, followed by an inability to walk, hindered speech, and possibly even vomiting. At the opposite end of the scale, the high value and health properties of wheat are well known and wheat is used

to sustain life and used to make bread and ale. In John's Gospel Jesus refers to himself as the bread of life.

The New Bible Dictionary describes the sowing of darnel amongst wheat as an act of revenge punishable under Roman law. It is likely that Jesus and his listeners were aware of this and so could relate to the story being told.

So what can this parable tell us today?

Many good seeds and bad seeds have been sown, and grown together over these last months as we have faced COVID-19.

There have been the good seeds, like the wheat of community spirit- people meeting, often for the first time, others in their street through seeking to support the most vulnerable, or to remember VE Day, or strangers talking to one another as they wait in the queue outside Tesco.

There have been good seeds sown about the value of family time, with many people reporting that they have really valued their time at home together, to be with their families.

But along side the good seeds there have been bad seeds, which have grown into weeds, the scaremongering of the press, making some people afraid to leave their homes, flared tempers, frustrations and entrapment in unhappy households, unable to leave, and, the most worrying to me, the resulting economic issues that are leading us into the worst global recession ever, with hundreds of thousands in England alone who have lost or are likely to lose their jobs or livelihood.

Weeds have grown which have asked the questions of us about where is God in all of this - where can we find comfort when everything we know is changing?

How are the experiences that we have had during this time, when we've had to live life very differently, going to change or grow? What good crops have grown in our own lives during this time that we need to give deliberate attention to now, so that they don't wither or get choked and can, instead, carry on growing?

Maybe for you it is about maintaining those new relationships and level of care in our community, or about making sure that time with family is not squeezed out again.

Maybe, for you, it is embracing technology and a growing appreciation that church is about people meeting together as well as a physical building.

Maybe it is about finding a new or deeper relationship with God.

And the best news is that when we decide to give this deliberate attention to the good crop that has been sown in our lives, Jesus is ready and able to work alongside us - to be our co-farmer.

So whatever plants have been sown in your life during these last few months, don't let them get choked by the pressures of life. Rather, be deliberate in attending to them and as you do so, allow God to be a co-farmer with you, so that these good seeds in all our lives may grow and grow, to be strong and stable parts of our lives, bearing fruit year after year.

When we look at our world today the virus, the wars and unrest that occur it's easy to think that the enemy has the upper hand. But this is not true. God is patient, he waits until just the right time. We can leave the weeding to the angels, and get on with the mission Jesus has given us -- proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

Each one of us is made in his image but each one of us has our own mind and unique qualities. I like to think that when Gods harvest is complete, when the evil ones are burnt in the fiery furnace, that those of us left are not all bundled up like identical stacks of wheat but that we look as colourful and vibrant as the daisy field near the bypass bridge.

Let us end with a prayer written by Jane Archdeacon of St Albans
Creator God,

You have sown many seeds in our lives over these last few months. Help us to know which to attend and care for now, that we may continue to grow in ourselves, and in you, in this next season. Protect us from all that might stifle or choke that growth and may we, together with you, grow more and more in your likeness, each and every day. Amen