**Wheat and Weeds**

**(Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)**

I wonder if any of you like growing things from seed? Earlier this summer I sowed some nasturtium seed, and after a while there were some tiny pairs of nasturtium leaves and some I suspected to be weeds. Only when both grew larger was it possible to tell the difference and pull up the weeds.

Jesus told a story about a man, who sowed good wheat seed in his field, but an enemy came and sowed weeds. This would have been a specific weed that a Palestinian farmer was plagued with, the bearded darnel. In its earliest stages it was indistinguishable from wheat, but when both had half grown it was easy to tell the difference. However, by then the roots would have become entangled, so the man in the story tells his servants not to try to pull up the darnel because the wheat would have been pulled up along with it. Instead they must wait until harvest time, when the workers would be told to collect the weeds and tie them into bundles to be burned, while the wheat would be put in the man’s barn. (The idea of a man deliberately sowing the weed darnel in someone else’s field wasn’t just imagination. We know it happened because it was forbidden by Roman Law and its punishment laid down.)

The stories Jesus told to the crowds who came to hear him were parables – they always had a deeper meaning lying behind them. People would have remembered the story and hopefully puzzled out the meaning for themselves. Unusually on this occasion we are given the meaning of the parable, as Jesus explained it later to his disciples. The field is the world and the one who sows the seed is Jesus, the Son of Man (Matt 13:37). The good seed stands for the children of the kingdom while the weeds are the children of the evil one, the devil, who sows the seed (v. 39). The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are angels. Then they will weed out of God’s kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will be judged and punished (v. 42). ‘Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (v. 43). As Paul put it in our epistle reading, then the children of God will be revealed in freedom and glory (Rom 8:19, 21).

It is clear that in this world there is a mix of good and evil, and our lives are never free from temptation to sin. Yet Jesus teaches that there is a difference between the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one. We can’t always tell the difference. We never fully understand another person’s situation and intentions.

A long time ago when I was in my twenties, I lived in a small mountain town in Indonesia. Still lingering there was the old belief that a human sacrifice was necessary if crops were to be good. It was said that some of the fruit sold in the market was injected with poison, meant for a random victim. So, you had to buy from people you trusted, because the poisoned fruit and the good fruit would look exactly the same.

A good person may appear to be bad and a bad person to be good. We should never attempt to judge who is in God’s kingdom and who is not. God looks at the whole of a person’s life and their heart and he will judge justly. It is not just a case of doing good or bad things but is a choice we make, whether we live for ourselves or for the kingdom of God. We can’t be wheat some of the time and a weed some of the time – they are totally different.

Paul expresses it differently. He contrasts living according to the flesh or living by the Spirit (Rom 8:13). When Paul uses the word ‘flesh’ he doesn’t mean physical flesh but our human nature, in all its sin and weakness, what a person is without God and without Christ. On the other hand, those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God (v. 15). But in this life, we are never free from the effects of sin in the world around us and the struggle against it in ourselves.

Again, there is a choice to be made, there are two ways to live. If we are led by the Spirit of God, he gives us strength to fight against sin in our lives and assures us that we are God’s adopted children (Rom 8:14,15). The Holy Spirit is God’s good gift to us whom he promises to give us if we ask (Luke 11:13).

In Jesus’ parable he warns of a day of judgement at the end of the age. Then all causes of sin and all who do evil will be weeded out of God’s world (Matt 13:41). All wrongs will be righted, and the kingdom of God will come in all its fullness.

There are three things we can learn from this story of Jesus. First of all, we should not waste time judging others or trying to sort out who is a true Christian or not. Second, a day of reckoning, a time of sorting out, is coming, which is a very solemn thing to think about. Third, have we ourselves as individuals chosen to be a child of the kingdom, living in the power of the Holy Spirit? In other words, am I wheat or a weed in God’s field?