

19th July - 6th Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 - the parable of the wheat and the weeds

So you remember how last week I was telling you that a parable is like a coded message and its important to get the key right - because each parable has its own key - and things can't be interpreted how you like. Last week, the sower was you or me or an evangelist or a disciple - this week - the sower is Jesus, or using his code name - the Son of Man (you have to remember that Jesus was an underground revolutionary , a wanted man in a police state - he needed codes to survive) . Adn this time the seed doesn't stand for the message, it stands for people. So please remember never to say that just because 2 parables have the same thing - a vineyard or a sheep - that they mean the same in every parable, they might - but you must check it out!

if I was doing a bible study I'd ask questions
what most strikes you about this parable?

And I guess one of the big issues here might be - Jesus mentions the Devil.

I know its not very Anglican or Church of England to mention the devil, adn that as English people we are just a bit wary of anything that seems a bit, well, extreme or odd. (which is funny because we compete to make the best jam or marrow - which is taking gardening to a bit of an extreme!, and we we have men putting bells on their legs doing Morris dancing -which some might see as odd, anyway)

And there's two things that people do with the devil.

They either deny he exists, or they make him far too powerful.

But its clear that Jesus thought the Devil was real. Just as he talks about angels and demons - the devil, or satan - which means the opposer, is also in Jesus understanding of the world. And the devil is the enemy of that which is good. The devil is evil and promotes and tries to spread evil. But.. this is not a dualistic world where good vs evil, ooh - who will win? The devil is a created being, like angels or you and me. The devil is not God. God made Lucifer, and it was only when lucifer rebelled adn wanted the worship to go to him, that God chose the smallest of the angels Michale, to kick him out of heaven - and he fell down to earth. So you should know all this.

So the devil is angry, and weaker than we think, but he likes to bluff, and lie. God is allowing him to live because he is hoping that he might repent, and possibly because he enjoys turning all the devils worst deeds upside down into good things instead. The devil tried to mess my life up, and God saved me. The devil killed Jesus - but God raised him to life again - ha ha! Every evil thing can be turned into good, if we allow God to work his alchemy and turn lead into gold - this is what George Herbert is talking about in Teach me my God and king - he says whatever we do for God, he transforms - who sweeps a room as for thy sake, makes that and the action fine.

And you might think 'well that's easy to say, Simon, but hard in reality' - and you'd be spot on. Its incredibly hard - really bad stuff happens to people, to you and me sometimes, but God can turn it around - it is our choice to let him work through it. You may have heard of the guitarist Eric Clapton - he wrote Layla, Wonderful Tonight among many others. He had a pretty horrid life and spent a lot of years as an alcoholic and heroin addict. Finally he met a good woman, and when they had a child, Connor, it was a reason for him to stay sober, and in his words, grow up. So he's doing ok, staying off the wagon, when the worst possible thing happens. In a terrible freak accident, his darling 4 year old falls from a hotel window and dies. And Clapton said - his world ended. And at home, after the funeral, he was going through thousands of letters of condolence, and he found a letter Connor had posted some weeks before - just a toddler's scrawl - I love you Daddy. And he said - I realised that if I could get through this sober, I could get through anything. And he determined to live his life to the best, the fullest, as a kind of tribute to his son. He stays sober because of his boy. And he has gone on to do so much for Alcoholics Anonymous - he hosts a sober new years eve party for thousands, he's set up drug and rehabilitation clinics, and his music and songs now speak of heaven and hope, instead of drugs and despair. Its like Joseph says to his brothers when they come to Egypt and he reveals who he is - you meant this for harm, but God has used it for good. God really can use all the evil things the devil sends our way for his good and his glory.

So we shouldn't deny that the devil exists but neither should we give him credit for stuff that's not his. I've been in a lot of churches, and many of the more excitable ones! They are all for stamping down Satan, praying him out, which is great - but sometimes they say - that bad thing - its because of the devil. That bad behaviour I did, that was the devil, he made me do it. And I've even heard people talking about world leaders and world events as if Satan had a seat in the United Nations, or controlled this or that president like a puppet. Look Satan is just not that powerful - its all smoke and mirrors, like the grand wizard of oz.

So once we get past the shock of mentioning the devil. There is an enemy, but he's not that great.

So back to the parable -

why do you think Jesus told this parable - was it to comfort or reassure, or to warn?

The angels - the harvesters - ask God or Jesus - why are there bad people in the world - So Jesus is addressing a concern that people have - the angels ask - should we go and weed the field - pluck them out. And he says no.. you'll have to tell me if this is good or bad farming - you might uproot the good wheat growing next door. Wait until the end of the age, until judgement day - when all is gathered in and the good and the bad are separated.

And what I like about that, is that God, who knows everything, all the secrets of our hearts, he will judge rightly, because he knows all the facts. And that he gives the wicked the longest possible time to repent, to hear the good news and be saved.

And I am also reassured, that those who do not repent, who have done such terrible evil - they will get what's coming to them, and the victims will see true justice done.

What does it tell us today...

In the meantime.. we need to remember that it is only because of Jesus, because we are his, we have given our lives to him, so we don't get what we also deserve... And that just because God is going to bring true justice at the end of time, that does not take away our responsibility to stop people who do bad things, to try and bring and some restorative partial, justice to those who break the law and threaten society with their behaviour. We still have to work for truth, peace, goodness, - and rather than demonising people, live with the hope that they can change.

Black lives matter has challenged us to see where the police and courts act with prejudice and ignorance, rather than justice. And we, in leafy Dorset can say, well that's not us. But there is racism in the Church of England, which we're part of. And I've seen on facebook people talking about travellers and Gypsies as if they are all the same, presumed guilty rather than innocent.

So like last week, maybe we should look inside, rather than trying to think we are good wheat and judging those around us as bad weeds. Take the log out of our own eyes, before taking the speck from someone else's. And just be really grateful that our God is full of mercy to us, that we don't get what we deserve.

Our God is slow to anger of great kindness.