

## The Readings

**Genesis 28: 10-19a**

**Psalms 139: 1-11, 23-24**

**Romans 8: 12-25**

**MATTHEW 13: 24-30, 36-43**

## The Sermon : Rev'd. David

Today's Gospel passage contains one of Jesus' challenging "Parables of the Kingdom". I'd like to direct our attention to it this morning, it's the one we know as "The Wheat and Weeds".

In our world today it is becoming more and more difficult to separate the real from the counterfeit.

You can visit Bali in Indonesia and buy counterfeit goods like Rolex Watches and Oakley sunglasses for \$10, on the beach there.

My daughter once brought me a pair of Oakley sunglasses there, and I wore them proudly around waiting for someone to notice, but the truth is they were a fake.

Counterfeiting is big business today, it's a deliberate attempt to deceive.

In the parable of the Wheat and Weeds, there is some counterfeiting going on that is far more serious.

Jesus is explaining that the Kingdom of Heaven in the world is confronted with counterfeit.

He wanted His disciples, and He wants us to understand some important truths about this, so He tells this parable, and leaves us in no doubt about what it means.

The parable is basically simple. Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a farmer who plants wheat in his field. He has taken considerable time and effort to sow his field with good seed, with the expectation of producing a good and bountiful harvest of wheat. In the night, however, his enemy comes and deliberately over-sows his wheat field with weeds, known as darnel seeds. It's a weed that looks like wheat as it grows.

The natural tendency of the farm workers is to go and pull up the weeds, but the farmer says no, he decides to leave the weeds in order that the crop itself would not be harmed by pulling out the wheat with the weeds. But, he says, leave them there until the harvest comes, then he will tell the harvesters, who will then be able to recognize the weeds, to separate them, and the weeds will be burned, and the wheat stored.

I read a quote from someone who said "A weed is simply a plant that no one loved".

I suspect some of us would not be that charitable with weeds.

But the thing about weeds is the same as in this parable, we don't have to plant them, something or someone else does it for us. And sometimes it is not easy to decide which are the weeds.

The meaning of the parable is also clear. Jesus tells us what it means. He doesn't do that with all His parables, but He does with this one. He says that He is the farmer that plants the good seed, the wheat, named as representing "people of the Kingdom of Heaven". Satan is the sower of the bad seed, the weeds, named as representing "the people who belong to the evil one". The wheat field is the world in which there are these two kinds of people.

That's the explanation of the parable, and it is very clear.

Of course, it's not very popular today to be this clear.

We notice that there are only two types of people in this parable, and there are only two types of people in this world: the people of the kingdom and the people of the evil one, the righteous and the wicked, Christians and unbelievers. Contrary to the messages of many, there are not many roads to God. There is only one, and that is through Jesus. When He said "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NLT), He meant that to be an exclusive statement. This goes against the popular mindset of our culture, which takes a universalist view, claiming that whatever you want to believe or not believe is fine, you can make the Bible's message suit you, whatever works for you. But in Jesus' eyes, there are no shades of grey. It was likely that same day that He said "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). So this Parable of the Wheat and Weeds definitely, please pardon the pun, goes against the grain. But its message is so important for us as God's people.

The main message of the parable is that, just as the weeds are merged in with the wheat, and while they grow they look the same, so in the world, there will always be good and evil, and it is sometimes difficult to identify the true people of the Kingdom of Heaven from the others. And the parable provides understanding as to why there is evil, and how Jesus will deal with it.

Just as the farmer waits until the harvest to separate the weeds and burn them, so the Lord will wait until the judgment at the end of the age, to separate the true from the counterfeit. And He describes what will happen to the people of the evil one like this: "Then He will throw them into a flaming furnace where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain" (v42 CEV). But He describes what will happen to the people of the Kingdom like this: "...the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (v43 NRSV)

The importance of the messages in this parable is made clear to the disciples and to us, by our Lord's closing words. He said: "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand", or we could say: "If you hear this message, pay attention", because the parable is also intended to give us some important messages to understand the age in which we live, and to point us to important messages for living our lives as followers of Jesus.

Jesus makes it clear that the enemy in the message of the parable is the evil one, or Satan. Let us make no mistake about how real he is, any evening news on television confirms that.

He is always in opposition to Jesus, one way he tries to destroy His work is by placing look-a-likes with counterfeit messages in the world, that lead many astray. Jesus was absolutely clear about the reality of his tactics. John records His words in chapter 8 of his Gospel. Speaking about Satan there, He said: "He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him.....for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44 NLT).

We need to be discerning in today's world, we need to know God's Word, to be able to identify the counterfeit messages, so we always live His truth, and speak His truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

And we do this knowing that there will be a harvest time. Actions do have consequences.

We see in Jesus words how things will turn out in the end for those who choose to remain "people who belong to the evil one". The parable ends with the assurance that Jesus will send His angels, named in the parable as "the harvesters", to identify them in judgment. The message here is that this is His work, only He can do it, because He judges in perfect righteousness and in His time.

But for now, there is an opportunity to change that, to join those of whom Jesus said: "the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom". What a day that will be, what a day for us to look forward to.

So there is also a message here for us about God's amazing grace, that should inspire us in our witness to the world around us. The reason the farmer does not want the workers to attempt to remove the weeds before harvest, is the damage it may do to the wheat. And Jesus explains this as picturing God's grace which delays the coming day of judgment.

This challenges us to focus on sharing the Gospel through our lives and in our words, because it has the power to change weeds into wheat. It is indeed good news.

Now we may find this a difficult and unsettling parable, but it is clear that it is one which Jesus is wanting us to hear and understand. He wants us to recognise how the weeds function, to look like the wheat in our world today. These are voices that seek to change and compromise the values of God's kingdom. And like the farm workers in the parable, we need to be aware and see what is evil around us, in all its forms.

And that again points us to the importance of knowing God's word as "a lamp to guide our feet and a light for our path" (Ps119:105), as the Psalmist described it, through every day of our lives.

But we are not to be discouraged or distracted by the "weeds", from the primary focus of our calling of to be salt and light in our everyday world, because we see in this parable, that instead of requiring the "weeds" to be rooted out of the world, and possibly hurting people in the process, Jesus allows them to remain until the harvest.

It's worth repeating, that this parable speaks to us about the wonderful grace of our Lord, which allows opportunity, until the harvest, for those named as "the people who belong to the evil one" to choose to become "the people of the Kingdom"

The parable teaches us to put our energy into being good "wheat". Our calling and our focus is on becoming healthy and strong as God's people, whose light shines in the field of the world, to bring light to all its darkness. In fact, if we give our energy to this, to use the imagery of the parable, that is the most effective form of weed control around.

It is said that in taking care of a lawn, healthy grass is extremely competitive and will crowd out most weeds that surround it. If a lawn is healthy, we shouldn't have to dig out many weeds at all. In fact, the presence of weeds is actually a sign that the grass is weaker than it should be. If there are lots of weeds in the grass, one of the best things to do is simply make the healthy grass grow thicker and stronger. It is so important in this world that we keep our focus on following Jesus.

I'd like to finish with an illustration that will hopefully remind us of this challenge.

It comes from the life of the golfing immortal, Arnold Palmer. He recalled a lesson he learned at the final hole of the 1961 US Masters tournament. He said "I had a one stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. I felt I was in pretty good shape. As I approached my ball, I saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. He motioned me over, stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations." I took his hand and shook it, but as soon as I did, I knew I had lost my focus.

On my next two shots, I hit the ball into a sand trap, then put it over the edge of the green. I missed a putt, and lost the Masters. *He said:* You don't forget a mistake like that; you just learn from it, and become determined that you will never do that again. I haven't in the 30 years since."

Brothers and Sisters, I believe an important message for us this morning is about making sure we stay focussed on our calling as disciples of Jesus, to be salt and light for Him in our everyday world.

Jesus shows us, to use the parable's imagery again, what will happen and continue to happen in the "field", the world in which we live. We are not to be discouraged or distracted by this, because we know He will deal with it when He returns. In the meantime we must faithfully work in the "field", because our Lord longs for every "weed" to become "wheat" (2 Peter 3:9 CEV).

Lord, may your word live in us and bear much fruit for your glory. Amen