

The Church's prayer for this Sunday - The sixth Sunday after Trinity

Creator God,
you made us all in your image:
may we discern you in all that we see,
and serve you in all that we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 19th July 2020, The sixth Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 86: 11-end

- ¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
- ¹²I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name for ever.
- ¹³For great is your steadfast love towards me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.
- ¹⁴O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.
- ¹⁵But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
- ¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving-maid.
- ¹⁷Show me a sign of your favour,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen

Today's reading from the Old Testament: Isaiah 44: 6-8

Our Old Testament reading is part of a longer declaration of the only true God and Saviour.

⁶Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
⁷Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.
Who has announced from of old the things to come?^[a]
Let them tell us^[b] what is yet to be.
⁸Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one.

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Today's reading from the gospels: Matt 13: 24-30, 36-43

In our gospel reading today, we join those listening to Jesus who is teaching in parables.

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

²⁴He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" ²⁸He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" ²⁹But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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."

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are

collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A reflection for the sixth Sunday after Trinity by The Venerable Alex Hughes, Archdeacon of Cambridge

In the last few months, since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, I've had a bit of a conversion experience. I have become a gardener. Until earlier this year, my idea of gardening involved a laid-back chair in the sun, a gin and tonic, a bowl of olives and a good book. But then, in the absence of anything else to do during the lockdown, and the arrival of some beautiful weather, my wife persuaded me to get my hands dirty. I cleared out the terribly overgrown flower beds in the front and back gardens, and as soon as the government allowed, I drove out to the Orchard Garden Centre in Coton and spent a slightly eye-watering amount of money on shrubs and plants. And so, now, after all that effort and expense, I am determined to keep the garden looking nice. I have become a gardener. Which means that I have become mildly addicted to weeding. No one is more surprised about this than me, I can tell you. But why am I telling you any of this at all? Well, it's because it has shed a new light on the meaning of today's Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. Perhaps you could see that coming!

If I'm being completely honest with you, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds is not one of my favourites. I prefer what you might call the "nice parables" – the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep – the ones where everything turns out happy in the end. I don't like to hear about weeping and gnashing of teeth. It goes against my image of a loving and merciful God, who gives his life for us. Having said that, like most people, I'm sure, I do want an end to evil and victory for the good. So I can receive the end of today's parable as a promise, not a curse – the promise that, in the end, love wins. But, with the help of my conversion to gardening, I have come to see that this is not actually a parable about what happens at the end time. This is a parable about the meantime, the now-time.

For the most part, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds re-tells one of the oldest stories known to humankind. It goes like this: "We are the wheat; we are on the good side; we've got it all right. They are the weeds; they have got it all wrong; they are the ones who mess everything up. They need to become like us – and if they won't, we'll find a way to get rid of them!" Perhaps later today you could look at the news headlines and work out how many versions of this story you can spot. It is everywhere! But it's not in the Gospel. It's not Jesus' story. Because, you see, when Jesus re-told the story, he added a crucial twist. He said, "Let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the harvest."

Now we know that Jesus was a carpenter by trade, not a farmer; but even a carpenter, growing up in a poor community, where people had to grow a lot of their own food, would know that this is terrible advice. Even I know that it's terrible advice! If you want to make the most of your crop, you have to tend to it: you have to pull out the weeds. But Jesus says, "Don't do it!"

This is Jesus' twist on the old story. He knows perfectly well that there is good and evil, right and wrong. But he also knows that human beings are very bad at telling the difference. After all, the people of his own day decided that he was a weed, who had to be removed and destroyed. And think how many times in the course of human history people have mistaken good for bad and bad for good. Think of the atrocities that have been committed by people who thought they were doing the right thing. Think of all those who have been wrongly accused, misunderstood or betrayed by people who thought they knew better. It's the tragic story of violence and hatred between nations and communities and neighbours, and even between family and friends. It's a terrible story, full of wailing and gnashing of teeth.

But the story as Jesus tells it is one in which we don't rush to divide the world up into wheat and weeds, Us and Them. Instead, we give space and time to see what might happen if we learn to live together, to grow together, towards the fulfilment of God's good purposes for us all.

Of course, a parable isn't, and isn't supposed to be, a complete philosophy of life. There are surely times when we must resist evil. But the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds shifts our perspective. It invites us to question our immediate responses and knee-jerk assumptions, and to practise the patience and hospitality that are the hallmarks of his kingdom. It's another way of saying, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Jesus believed that evil will not last forever, and that love will win in the end. But in his words, and in his own life, he entrusted the final outcome to God. In the meantime, he knew that God has given us neighbours to love and to learn from, and to work together with for the sake of justice and peace. The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds is for the middle time, the time of our lives now. "Let anyone with ears listen!"