

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**Collect**

Almighty God,  
send down upon your Church  
the riches of your Spirit,  
and kindle in all who minister the gospel  
your countless gifts of grace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**Romans 8:12-25**

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And 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?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let 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.’”

Then 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.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are

the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

## Sermon

One of my earliest memories is from my first year in primary school. I was five, and for those of you who remember the school books of the 1970s, we were reading about the Village of Three Corners, with Roger Red Hat, Billy Blue Hat and Jennifer Yellow Hat. There were workbooks, and I had reached a page with a big blank box. That seemed to me to be a cue to draw a picture. At the age of five, my favourite pictures were of houses and gardens, and so I started to draw. Unbeknown to me, no-one else was drawing anything, waiting to be told what to do. And so, when the teacher came over, I was told off very firmly for drawing the wrong picture in my blank box. Apparently it was supposed to be a picture of Billy Blue Hat in the pond. And I can still remember, in green ink at the top of the page, the teacher writing “Theresa, Read the Instructions!”

It’s probably fair to say that the level of distress this incident caused was excessive. I remember crying to that point of gasping for air. And the teacher certainly had no sympathy, telling the other children to get on with their work and leave me alone. And so, once the tears had subsided, the lesson that I learnt was never to take a risk; never to try anything unless I was sure it was right; that it is worse to get something wrong than not to try anything at all. And that pleasing the teacher is highest aim of all. I remained a timid child for the rest of my schooling. Though, as you all know, I’ve got over it now!

But the point I want to make is a serious one. That experience taught me the wrong thing. Through the reprimand – regardless of the fact that I do believe it was excessive – she intended that I should learn the value of reading the instructions. Which is a perfectly valid lesson. But somehow in doing so, she made me so fearful of getting things wrong that any creative instinct, any tendency towards innovation, or giving something a try was lost.

A similar thing can happen when someone enthusiastic is told that they are too loud. In order to reduce the volume, the risk is that their enthusiasm is lost. Or if someone is told that their handwriting is untidy and they need to make it neater. The risk is that in spending so much time focusing on neat handwriting, any focus on the content of what is being written is lost. The creativity is put on hold to make sure that what is written is tidy. I wonder if you have your own examples. A time when you have been given feedback about how you come across, yet in trying to implement that feedback, you have ended up losing something important about who you are.

This morning’s parable, that familiar story about the wheat and the weeds – or tares, as many of us will recognise more readily – is a reminder of the reality of this world. That within this beautiful world we find good and bad – both wheat and weeds. We know this to be true, don’t we? That there is beauty and ugliness. Acts of kindness and generosity; and acts of selfishness and violence. I sometimes think that those who write and edit our newspapers might do well to recognise that there really is wheat as well as tares. But for the rest of us, in our daily lives, we will experience some combination of good and bad.

And, as I hope my opening story illustrates, within ourselves we also experience that same combination of wheat and weeds. We know that inside ourselves sometimes we feel things that we are proud of, and sometimes things that we are less than proud of. Just as sometimes our words are kind and gracious, and sometimes they are not. And sometimes our actions are motivated by generosity and love, while at others they are self-centred.

This parable is a reminder of what we already know – about the world and about ourselves. And the message Jesus gives us is a helpful one. He reminds us not to spend our time ripping up the weeds. Not to spend our time focusing on looking for what is wrong and getting rid of it. There are several reasons for that. The first is quite simply that, in its grandest sense, judgement is not our job. But even when we think about the judgements we make on a daily basis, those that inform our choices, which might be better described as discernment, we are always works in progress. It may be that what we see as the right path on one occasion, we recognise to be the wrong one on another. Trying to know right from wrong is something we are engaged in a lot, but it is an ongoing process and we need to be careful about being too final in our judgements.

The second reason is that if we focus only on getting rid of what is wrong, we are very likely to miss what is right. And, as I have tried to show, if in ourselves our focus is on getting rid of what is wrong, we can actually lose or subdue what is right. Quite often those characteristics that people see as positive have a flip side. But if we focus only on the flip side and try to get rid of it, we can lose the positive characteristic, too.

And that links to the fact that, as the parable seems to show us, the wheat and the weeds are actually inextricably intertwined. Tearing up one risks tearing up the other. They have grown alongside one another and grow well and successfully that way. Whether or not we will ever understand why good and bad co-exist in the world, the fact is that they do.

I have recently been reading an interesting book about leadership development. The author characterises conventional leadership development in this way. People are shown a model of what a good leader looks like. They are then asked to consider what they are like as a leader themselves. And the task of leadership development is to bridge the gap between reality and the ideal.

The problem is that, first, there is no such thing as an ideal leader. Someone can tick all the right boxes and still their company might fail. What happens in any organisation is about so much more than the leader. Second, it risks losing the infinite variety within humanity, trying to force those who lead to be a shape that just doesn't suit them.

There is something about this morning's parable that helps us to see things differently. It is not about accepting that which is bad and wrong with the world without question. Rather it is about growing into the people we were made to be – and allowing others to do the same. Given that we can all recognise within ourselves both wheat and weeds, perhaps the call is to allow our own wheat to flourish, and to help support others in doing the same. The image of the end of time is one of only wheat, so it might help us all to have spent time exploring that part of ourselves beforehand. It's what Paul refers to as living in the Spirit. He knew just as well as we do that we don't always get it right. But he also knew that our attempts to live more in the Spirit and less in the flesh are never wasted. That they are what open up the possibility of life itself, and give us a glimpse of life eternal.

Amen