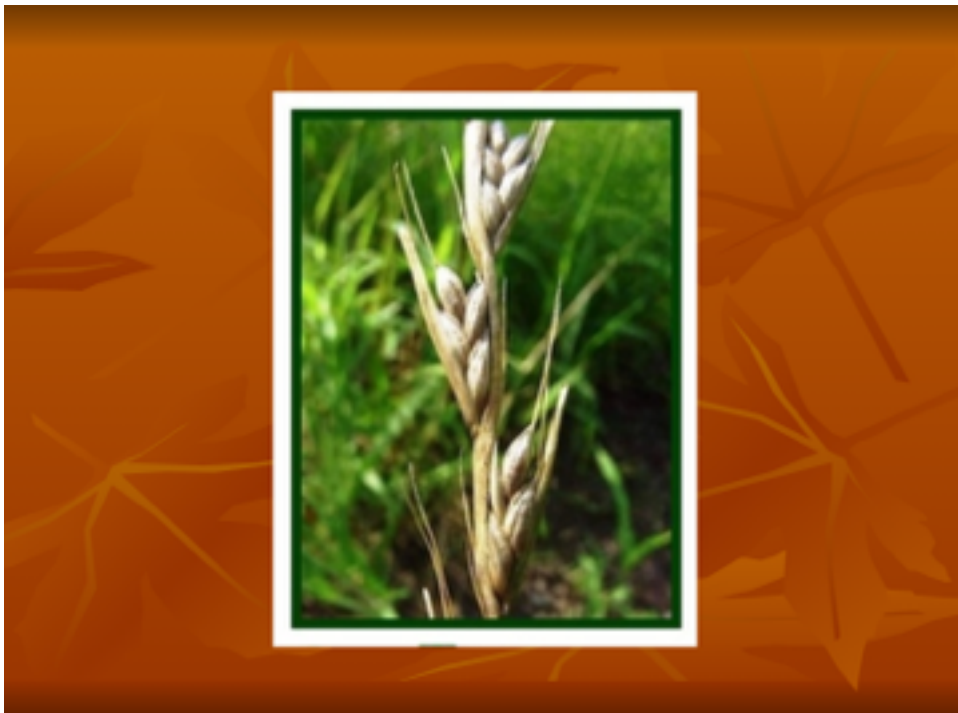


## Matthew 13.24 PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

Today's Gospel reading is one of Jesus's parables about the Kingdom of God. Jesus' parables were not just stories with a moral – they were meant to be a focus for change. When Jesus said “let anyone with ears listen!” he meant, “What I'm saying is important! Don't just hear the words – do something about them!”

Today's parable is about weeds. Something we all find a trial. Isn't it amazing that in the most adverse of conditions, it's the WEEDS that continue to flourish? In recent months, our labyrinth has been invaded by onion weed. It is notoriously difficult to eradicate. Someone once said that weeds have mastered every possible survival technique except growing in rows!

When Jesus told this parable, he was using the familiar things of everyday life, which his hearers would easily relate to. The weeds spoken of in this parable are also called Tares some translations. Another name they're known by is darnel (or *darnel*).



All Jesus hearers would have been familiar with it, and sympathized with the farmer in the parable. This type of weed was a farmer's nightmare. If it got into a field with wheat, it was indistinguishable from it, as the plants began to grow. Not even the farmers could tell them apart.

That is, until the plants were beginning to fruit. The heads were different.



Then the farmer would realize with horror that his crop was full of tares.



But by then it would be too late to pull them up. They had strong, fibrous roots which would intertwine with the roots of the wheat, so that if you did pull them up, the wheat would come up too.

So the farmers would let them go until the harvest. Then they'd be gathered up with the wheat, separated and the weeds burned. It was time consuming and costly, but it could be done.

The scenario Jesus outlined, about an enemy sowing bad seed, wasn't an unknown one. The terrorism of that day was for someone to sow bad seed in a family's fields. It happened often enough for there to be a law forbidding it.

The disciples listened to the story, no doubt fascinated, but they didn't have a clue what Jesus was getting at. So they asked Jesus to explain it to them.

Unlike most of Jesus's other parables, this one is an allegory. That means that various characters and events in the story represent other things.

The sower was the Son of Man.

The field was the world.

The good seeds were the sons of the kingdom.

The weeds were the sons of the devil.

The enemy that sowed the bad seed was the devil himself.

The harvest was the end of the age.

The harvesters were the angels.

Jesus went on to explain:

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!

What are we listening for?

Well – there are a number of lessons we can hear in this parable:

The first one is:

- there is always a hostile power in this world, looking for ways to destroy the good seed Jesus has sown. As believers, we find that there are always two influences that act on our lives. There are those which will help the seed to flourish and grow, and those that seek to destroy it.

Peter reminds us to discipline ourselves, and keep alert. That like a roaring lion our adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.

Paul warns us that our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Living for Christ is a constant battle, and we learn from this parable that we must always be on our guard. In an age that plays down the supernatural, and scoffs at the concept of an adversary such as the devil, we can become complacent. We must always be vigilant, and not allow the enemy to take us by surprise.

We don't need to live in fear though as the evil one was defeated on the cross.

A verse to carry with us is this one:

“Greater is he that is within you than he that is in the world.” God wins. We need to remember that.

The second lesson we can hear in this parable is:

- **that it is really hard to distinguish between those who are in the Kingdom and those who are not.** Someone who appears 'bad' may in fact be 'good', and vice versa. Therefore we mustn't be too quick with our judgments.

Do you remember the Christian bikers that called themselves The God Squad ? This group emerged in an era when bikers had a very dubious reputation. To meet this crowd of Christian bikers when they roared into town on their Harleys, you'd swear they were rotten to the core. They were scary! They had long hair, wore leather, smoked and swore. They were a rough lot. Yet this was their culture – and it was from within this culture, many of them had come to know Christ. They stayed in their culture and witnessed for him. Yet many Christians back then disapproved of them. If we came across them in the middle of town this afternoon the odds are many of us would disapprove as well. But you cannot tell a person's spiritual standing by what they look like, or by the people they hang with.

If the reapers in this parable had had their way, they would have gone in and ripped out the weeds, taking the good wheat with them. Judgment had to wait until the harvest came.

No-one who sees only part of something can judge the whole thing. If we only know part of someone's life, we are not in a position to judge the whole of their life. We've got to leave that to God who sees the whole picture.


There is a quote I like from a guy called James S. Stewart. It's this: "God judges a man, not by the point he has reached, but by the way he is facing; not by distance, but by direction."

*James S. Stewart (1896-1990)*

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A third lesson we can hear in this parable is:

- **That judgment definitely does come in the end.** It often seems that the sinful and the godless get away with everything, while the innocent struggle and struggle. In fact that is a constant cry from the psalms – "why do the wicked prosper???" "Why do the innocent suffer?" This parable reminds us that in the life to come this will all be set right. Wickedness will be judged, and the righteous – those who put their trust in Jesus – will see their reward.

And the fourth lesson we learn from this parable is:

- **That the only person with the right to judge is God.** Only God can ultimately discern the good from the bad.

I have heard stories of ministers who have refused to bury someone because the deceased was not considered a “Christian”. I would find that a very hard position to take. Only God sees all of a person’s life and can see into their heart. Only God knows what transpires between a person and himself in those moments before the person finally leaves this world. Who are we to say that a person has not made a satisfactory response to God? Certainly the fruit of a person’s life is a fair indication of their position in the Kingdom – but there are people who come to know God, who because of intellectual or emotional or cultural handicaps, don’t show the fruit we would expect. And there are people who come to God in their final moments, who don’t have time to display any fruit. The thief on the cross was one of those, yet he was promised a place in paradise with Jesus.

“Let anyone with ears listen!” says Jesus. What he means is, “Don’t just hear the words – act on them!”

So – is there anything from this parable that speaks to us this morning? For instance....

- Have we perhaps been taking too lightly the battle that we’re in as Christians? Are we really vigilant enough? Do we recognise that by compromising God’s standards, or giving in to temptation we allow the devil a victory? Or do we strive, in God’s strength, to say “no!” to the things we know displease him, and “yes” to every opportunity to do good?
- Do we need to ask ourselves if we are too quick to decide someone is not part of God’s kingdom because they don’t measure up to our idea of what a Christian should look like? Do we need to pull our horns in as it were, and be more accepting of people we disapprove of?
- Does our trust in God’s sovereignty need some boosting? Do we perhaps need to remind ourselves that God is definitely in control, and will keep his word when it comes to judgment. And that we don’t need to give him a hand!

Jesus’s parables are more than just engaging stories with a moral. The parables were designed to unsettle, to challenge and to correct. They were designed to be a focus for change in our lives.

“Let anyone with ears listen!” said Jesus. May we truly be listening this morning. let’s pray.