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Online

Focus Reading: Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Holy God open our ears to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills, that we may serve you today and always. Amen.

Jesus often used parables in his teaching. In the Jewish tradition parables are used as a learning tool. They speak into the common themes of everyday life to guide and direct the hearer. They are meant to explain, to simplify.

Jesus used this tradition of storytelling as an effective tool to instruct his followers. The words and symbolism would speak directly into the experience of the hearer, as Jesus trained the disciples for their future roles as ministers and Missioners of the Word.

However, when we hear words that would have been familiar to those early followers of Jesus, too often we experience parables as cryptic keepers of secrets that need dissecting and interpreting, which we do through our own experience. This is not necessarily wrong, parables can teach us much about life and faith, however it is important we don't lose the original intent of Jesus words.

As we journey more deeply into this Season of Opportunity, the Gospel passages have contained many references to gardening; sowing, weeding, and eventually, harvesting. In today's gospel reading we have a taste of all three.

The passage I am focusing on today is from Matthews Gospel, Chapter 13, verse 24-30, and 36-43

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

²⁴ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ 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?’²⁸ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’²⁹ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.³⁰ 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.’”

The Use of Parables

³⁴ Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing.³⁵ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.”

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

³⁶ 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.”³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers,⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears^[d] listen!

Many years ago, I had the privilege of travelling to the Holy Land. It was a life changing experience. It also opened my eyes to a different culture. This experience powerfully informed my understanding of scripture as I continued academic study.

As a consequence of that pilgrimage, whenever I encounter a parable I pause and ask myself ‘What is Jesus actually trying to convey in this situation?’

The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat: sowing, weeding and eventually, harvesting offer common themes of everyday life in the Middle East.

One of the undeniable realities of middle eastern horticulture is the barrenness of the landscape. A stark contrast to the beautiful green and gold of the wheat fields of Australia. Here we have well tilled, arable land that produces abundant crops. Seed is sown in soil that is well prepared, growth is abundant.

The arable land in the Middle East looks nothing like ours. Most of it is mountainous dry, rocky and desolate. We wouldn't consider planting in such conditions and I certainly struggled to comprehend how anyone could grow a subsistence crop in those circumstances.

However, this is the reality of the farmers in those situations. They had to take every opportunity, and risk sowing where there might not be fruit because every grain produced was precious. And wherever they sowed it was inevitable that there would be weeds among the wheat.

For those who were hearing Jesus speak, they also knew the other reality of the situation. Removing the weeds too early risked ruining the crop, because in the early stages of growth the wheat and the weeds, probably a common noxious weed called darnel or cockle, mimicked the structure of the wheat. Too easily, and with the best of intentions, they could have been destroying the newly planted crop.

It wasn't until both wheat and weeds reached maturity that it was easy to tell them apart. The ears of real wheat are heavy and droop when mature, whereas the ears of darnel stand upright.

Sowing and weeding, not as simple as we might have thought.

Jesus had sown the seeds of love into a complex world of multiple faith traditions, colonising governments and, most importantly into the hearts of people who were struggling to find the right path, challenged by their culture, family circumstances and life in general.

There was an eagerness to name what was right and what was wrong. What to praise and what to condemn. To identifying the weeds amongst the wheat.

“Give to Caesar what is Caesars’ or follow this new Way of Christ. This was a costly decision and one not to be made or judged lightly.

As we see from the illustration of the wheat and the weeds, weeding too early will put the crop at risk. A level of maturity was needed before clear discernment could be made.

Weeds may not become wheat; however, humanity can and does change its mind. This parable offers hope for those who stumble.

But what of those who have a zealous urge to do the weeding? What does Jesus say about them?

I find it interesting that when Jesus speaks of the harvest, the gathering in of the wheat, it is the Angels, God’s agents, who will undertake this task. They will discern what is weed and what is wheat and act accordingly. It is not our task.

This was the message Jesus was trying to convey as he taught his disciples through the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

They, and we, have been trained and commissioned to be Missioners and Messengers; sowing the seeds of God’s abundant love, proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God is drawing near.

We have not been tasked to do the weeding.

This certainly offers us all a few challenges because we are all guilty of being zealous weeders.

I leave you with that thought.

May you Missioners and Messengers. Sow the seeds of love well, and tend God’s garden with care, in the confidence that God knows the right time to harvest. Amen.