

Sermon Seventh After Trinity Year A (16th in ordinary time)

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19, Psalm 86, Romans 8:26-27, Matthew 13:24-43

Loving judgement from beginning to end

This last week on the day of our Patronal festival we had three by-elections in the country – everyone got a prize. Each of the main parties claimed theirs was the more significant prize. We are asked to vote on policies yet we are often persuaded by feelings, personality and of course self-interest. The manifestos change constantly of course – and no doubt will change again after the prize giving of last week – all our parties will claim their fundamental values and principles do not change whilst seeking turn apples into pears and chalk into cheese depending on popular demand. If our politicians spoke in parables we would turn away. We would want much more certainty even if we know that the certainty of political promise usually turns into the certainty of disappointment. What if they offered the same unchanging manifesto of twenty thirty or forty years ago? Bonkers.

Jesus was not a political leader – his manifesto has never changed – he was not interested in votes of popularity. He was interested in one thing the life of God and our place in His life, now and for all eternity. This is why so many of the parables begin with the phrase *the kingdom of is like*....they remain as fresh and relevant as ever and you will remember them to your end much more than any political manifesto.

Today we have parables of judgement, beginnings and ends. But first we are reminded in the book of Wisdom that there is only one God who cares for all, exercising justice, and demonstrating might. God's teaching shows that His power is accompanied by kindness and provides hope through the possibility of repentance. This is reinforced in the encouraging words of our psalm that God is good, forgiving, and kind to those who call upon Him. All nations will worship Him for His wondrous deeds. He is merciful, patient, faithful, and gives strength to His servants.

We will return to the Paul's teaching to the Romans in a short while but in the parables the life of God and our place in it behind our Old Testament reading and psalmody is unfolded by Jesus in Parables - it is His manifesto he is the Word made flesh. Jesus gives us several parables related to the Kingdom of God, including the parable of the weeds in the wheat, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the yeast.

The first of these is a fascinating one much reflected on by the fathers of the church – and also by the Jack and Jill in the street : *“if god exists why are there all these bad people and bad things etc etc”*

Jesus presents the reality that in this world, both the children of the kingdom (believers) and the children of the evil one (unbelievers) will coexist until the final judgment, highlighting the presence of evil and the challenges faced by believers in a fallen world. It isn't as simple as that of course. Our forebears reflecting on this parable recognised that unbelief and error doesn't start and stop at the church door and is part of each of us in our partial and limited discipleship. The parable depicts ongoing spiritual struggles between good and evil within the self ,within the church, and within the world. The parable illustrates the ways of the enemy sowing deception and hindering the growth of God's kingdom. However unlike Jack and Jill in the street there is to be no throwing up of the hands in despair.

Rather the parable speaks of patience and delayed Judgment - how needy in our modern world which judges very quickly. Some of the Fathers remind us we should be thankful for God's delayed judgement. The parable emphasises God's patience and long-suffering. The wheat and the weeds are to grow together until the harvest, symbolising the delay of final judgment and the opportunity for change and repentance. This parable portrays God's ultimate sovereignty and authority over the final judgment – not ours - the wheat (righteous) will be gathered into His kingdom, and the darnel (wicked) will be cast into eternal punishment.

We should know that darnel is a particular weed that resembles wheat it is difficult to distinguish and rooting it out would remove what is good as well. So patience, growth and fruitfulness are by-words in this parable. As we try to attend to our lives, the life of the church, and our world; our spiritual growth and fruitfulness is represented by the wheat surrounded by the reality of the world.

In the end comes God's judgement not ours. Perhaps here is where we might take heart from our epistle for St.Paul. From his own experience he reminds us that the Spirit assists us in our weaknesses (when we are more weed than wheat). The Spirit communicates for us with deep emotions. God who knows all our hearts. He speaks famously in Corinthians of making clear what is hidden – recognising wheat from weed in ourselves if you like as well as the worlds we move in – right from wrong in our lives and life. The Holy Spirit's intention is to advocate for us and encourage us to grow in alignment with God's will.

This parable is followed by two short parables about the beginning and the completion of the kingdom of God. The little mustard seed is planted and becomes a great shrub or even tree to provide haven and protection to the birds of the air. It resonates with the apocalyptic book of Daniel in the Old Testament and nature of God's kingdom and rule. Then lastly the tiny amount of yeast enabling the whole of the flour dough to rise and become bread. The fulfilment of the kingdom is enabled by a few – a few good people making all the difference.

As with all the parables there is subtlety and a lifetime of prayerful reflection and application to the many changes in our life and world. The parables of Jesus never tire, never live in the past, always in the present for the sake of our futures in this life and the life to come. As we come now to celebrate the Eucharist we are reminded of Jesus's unchanging manifesto – the life of God and our place in it. We are offered the judgement of sacrificial love, we are offered a new beginning and offered a vision of our purpose and end – like yeast not for its own sake but for the sake of the kingdom; which with Christ is always close at hand.

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