**SERMON FOR TRINITY 6 | 19.07.2020**

Isaiah 44: 6-8; Romans 8: 12-25; St Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43)

**I am right, I know I am: that is, until I talk to you. After that, I may be right, I may be partially right – or I may be completely wrong!**

**I have enjoyed reflecting on today’s Gospel. Like last Sunday’s parable of the Sower, it has the potential to take us in lots of different directions. Quickly: the best possible seed is sown but to the horror of the labourers, they soon find that the top quality wheat they had been expecting to see was growing side by side with pernicious weeds too numerous and too closely packed to take out by hand. What were they to do?**

**As presented we have a perfectly familiar judgement story. *Don’t worry,* says the landowner, let’s *wait until harvest and then we will be able to take out the weeds, bundle them up and burn them.* The devil may have planted the tares, the darnel, the weeds – but they won’t be able to choke the pure crop: all will be well – at least for the righteous!**

**For most of the Church’s life this would have been seen as a picture of the person in the pew. *You are good and pure and holy, redeemed by Christ; but the devil is out to get you and every temptation and every imaginable sin has been planted in your heart – from outside.* As I Peter says in the lesson from Compline: *Beware your adversary the devil, prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.***

**And if it was true that the true believer needed to resist outside influences, how much so was it true for the Church and for the Biblical view of history? Was it not the role of the Church to protect the faithful against the prevailing view that after Adam and Eve fell from grace, the whole human race was simply groaning from sin and corruption until everything was happily resolved in the return of Jesus Christ at the Second Coming?**

**The trouble was that the Church had also unearthed a rather obscure passage from Maccabees (from the Apocrypha, some secondary writings in the OT) which reinforced its teaching that although we were all redeemed by Christ’s death on the Cross, humankind still had to pay a penalty for sins committed on earth.**

**These could, however be reduced (or even wiped out) through the various penitential offices of the Church so, for example, by the saying of the right number of prayers or paying a certain sum of money, a person, living or dead, could be released from punishment. You can see just how much power that gave to the Church! From crusaders fighting to restore Jerusalem to Christian rule, right down to the poorest peasant in his fields, all would want to do everything possible to avoid the pains of eternal hell.**

**But what it if it isn’t like that at all, said the Biblical scholar Martin Luther? What if God, instead of being a just judge who condemned sinners and rewarded the good – has simply and freely made us ‘right with God’ … simply because we believe, as St Paul seems to suggest in his letter to the Romans? *From now on, we who are justified by faith need have no fear…***

**John Riches says this was a defining moment of the Reformation – and perhaps even of European history. Luther wanted to reassure us that instead of being frightened of eternal punishment, we were (through faith) free citizens of the Kingdom of heaven, able to enjoy God’s favour, now and for all eternity ‘through grace alone’.**

**So what difference does that make to our reading of this parable? Let’s look at those tares, and weeds. Is it really true that everything that is not ‘pure wheat’ is actually demonic? Are the ideas which challenge us, the images that fascinate us, the light and the shade, the easy and the difficult, not actually all part of creation too? Aren’t the doubts which we have to wrestle with, the apparent obstacles that seem to make life so very difficult, the attitudes and burdens of those we share our lives, not also a ‘part of us’? This is what St Teresa of Avila discovered.**

**You don’t need to be a modern psychologist to know that the doubt and fears in our subconscious, as well as the temptations to sin and evil, are all elements of our three-dimensional selves. None of us are pure wheat, nor were we ever likely to be.**

**Because the story of the mature Christian life is the way in which we balance the wheat and the weeds as they grow so closely together. Jesus was right: at the end time we can get rid of anything that hasn’t served us well. But for the moment they have to be lived with.**

**But my experience, as I expressed at the very beginning is that the moment we work with others we simply have to allow ourselves to be shaped and influenced by other views and that is generally helpful.**

**This week we have had to return to the future of the Organ Project which has been on hold since January. And after much toing and froing, the Objectors have made it plain that they wish to take the matter to a full Consistory Court. This will be the second such occasion in the parish in five years – something that almost never happens to a parish - ever. And I have found myself wrestling with the rightness of all this. There will be a huge amount of work involved and some of the points will be contentious. I admit to having been a bit anxious about the whole issue this week – and then I stopped.**

**Max Ehrmann wrote the Desiderata in 1927 and his words hold true today as much as they did then:**

***Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.***

***As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.***

***Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.***

***Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.***

***Therefore be at peace with God and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.***