

Spring's coming – I **think** we've said goodbye to winter! Spring's on its way and it'll soon be time to turn our eyes to the garden again, and trying to clear up after the ravages of winter, and then trying to make it look nice for the summer. Some have more success than others in this. We don't do **too** badly in our garden – we've at least got next door's flowers growing through our fence to add colour.

There was a man, not good with gardens, went to a garden centre to ask their advice about what to grow in his garden. What plants could they **recommend**. After some discussion about his gardening abilities, the garden centre worker had an idea of just the things that would grow in this man's garden.

“**Ideal**,” he said. “These'll grow all year round, all types of weather. Doesn't matter whether your garden's sunny or shady. They flourish in any kind of soil.”

‘Sounds good’, said the man, ‘but what about fertilizer? I'm not good with choosing fertilizer.’

“Don't **need** any, and the rain provides enough water – you won't need to get out your hose to keep watering them.” ‘Better and better!’

“Don't worry if you've got pets and children, either – they can't **possibly** destroy them. The only **possible** drawback I can see, then, is the colour - they only come in green.”

“Excellent!” said the customer. “That's my favourite colour! I'll take some – how much?”

“You're not going to believe this – we're **giving** them away! Here, take this.” And he handed him a packet. As the man walked to the door, great big smile on his face, he gave the packet a shake, and to his surprise there seemed to be nothing in the packet. So he went back to the man who'd given it to him. “Don't worry, sir,” he said. “They're already **in** your garden, you don't need to do anything, weeds will grow there without you even planting them.”

Have you ever asked yourself, “What's the point of weeds? What are they **there** for? Why can't we get **rid** of them? Why are they everywhere in my garden? Surely someone can come up with something to get rid of them for **good**.”

Let's read from Matthew's gospel and chapter 13, where Jesus is telling a parable, a story about weeds. Starting verse 24. [Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43]

Jesus was a great speaker, he came to tell us the Good News about God and his coming kingdom, and he never **stopped** talking about it. In the chapters before this one, in chapter 11 he teaches and preaches in the towns of Galilee; in chapter 12 he teaches in the cornfields, then in the synagogue, then he withdraws to someone's home to talk to the people, before we see him at the beginning of chapter 13 by the lake, the Sea of Galilee. He speaks at every opportunity, in every locality, to all people. And people love to **hear** him, and there's such a large crowd wanting to hear him he gets into a boat, goes out into the cove and speaks to them, now in a sort of semi-circle around him.

There's a cove on the Sea of Galilee, the Cove of Parables, and I don't know if any of you have been to Lulworth Cove in Dorset, but I can well imagine that it was like **that** – a horse-shoe shaped inlet, and everyone all round him would be able to hear what Jesus was saying. What he was talking about was such great news, people wanted to hear what he had to say.

We all like hearing a good story, don't we? When **we** were young the first thing we used to watch in the days when telly broadcasting didn't start until 4 in the afternoon was 'Jackanory', when a famous person would come on and just read a story in front of the camera. We just enjoyed listening to stories.

Jesus was a great story-teller, he used to tell stories but he **used** them to illustrate something important to do with the kingdom of God, what it means to be a true **believer**, how to be in touch with God. He spoke to people in parables, like it says in verses 34 and 35 of this chapter, so that he could explain **hidden** things, in a way that those who wanted to hear, **could** hear and understand: verse 43, '*He who has ears, let him hear,*' Jesus says. Jesus takes something that people can **identify** with and uses it to explain something with deep spiritual significance.

'He who has ears, let him hear,' Jesus says. Those in authority, the rulers, the Pharisees were rejecting his message, but many **were** ready and willing to listen to him. Jesus revealed truths about God to those who were **hungry** to hear. His truth was **light** to those who heard and accepted what he had to say, while those who weren't prepared to listen and hear remained in darkness.

Jesus, the Son of God speaks, we do well to listen and hear what he has to say. I pray that we've all got our ears open tonight. Jesus holds up a picture, he challenges us to **see** the truth, be **convinced** of the truth, and make the right **decision** about where we go from here. Have we got ears to hear, or are our ears blocked? I hope and pray we're ready to listen.

So where are we going this evening? I want us look at the **time** this parable is talking about; about the good seed and the weeds – what or who they are; why the weeds are still **there** in the field; and what will be the eventual **outcome** for both the weeds and the good seed.

Verse 24 tells us that this story is about the Kingdom of heaven – ‘*the Kingdom of heaven is like ...*’, the other gospel writers Mark and Luke use the phrase the Kingdom of **God** – they’re talking about the same thing; but **when is this** that we’re talking about? Well, it’s clear that Jesus is talking about **now**, because verse 40 is very clear that the **solution** to the problem of the weeds will come ‘*at the end of the age*’. So this must mean that the kingdom of heaven is already here, to some extent, although not fully, not completely, because the weeds have to be dealt with yet.

In the letter to the Colossians, chapter 1, verse 13, we read, ‘*For he [God] has rescued us [that is believers] from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*’ God **has brought** believers into the kingdom. We remember that Jesus conquered sin, and death, and the evil one – the devil – when he rose from the dead.

At the end of Matthew’s gospel, when Jesus is telling his followers to go and spread the good news, he says of himself, ‘*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*’ Jesus is king. His kingdom has already come, but not fully yet. It will only be perfected with the final destruction of the devil when Jesus comes again. Jesus is King **now**. The kingdom of heaven is **now**.

Those who **believe** in Jesus recognise his kingship now, and begin to experience something of the benefits of his kingdom now, as soon as they see that he has set them free from their sins and is Lord of lords and King of kings. Eventually, Philippians chapter 2 says that ‘*at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*’ Philippians 2:10, 11. When Jesus comes again, that’s when the Kingdom of heaven will arrive in **fullness**. But the kingdom has already come in some measure. This is **now**.

What a great privilege to know these things now. What a great invitation Jesus gives earlier in Matthew’s gospel, chapter 7, when he says, ‘*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*’ He’s inviting **everyone** into his kingdom, you and me, into the kingdom of heaven. **This** is the great news that those crowds flocked after him to hear. **Now** is the day of salvation – if you hear his voice, respond, turn to him. This is **now**.

We can enjoy God's rule now – and who **wouldn't** want to know the God who is love, the God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Do **you** want to know this God? He invites you to listen and hear what he has to say

So after telling the parable to the crowds following him in verses 24-30, we see Jesus withdraw in verse 36 to **explain** the parable to his closest followers, his disciples. He leaves the crowds, goes into the house, his disciples follow him and they ask him to explain the story. So he does.

Let's look at the **contents of the field** – the seed sown there.

In verses 37 and 38, Jesus tells us who the **good** seed are, and who sowed them; and verses 38 and 39 tell who the weeds are and who sowed **them**. There are two types of seed sown, two sowers, but they're **together**, remember, in the one field, which is the world.

Verse 24 tells us that the field, which is the world, belongs to the sower of the **good** seed. The kingdom belongs to **God**, in verse 43, '*... the kingdom of their Father.*' and the king is also referred to as the Son of Man, a name given to Jesus, the Son of God. So the kingdom is **God's** kingdom.

The good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom, believers in Jesus, the Son of God. The good seed are believers that Jesus is the Son of God and has come to bring forgiveness for sins, and so open up the way for man to have a relationship with God. The good seed, sown by **God**.

Notice that God took the initiative in sowing the seed. As we've seen from verse 43, God is their Father – and it's **great** to be reminded that being part of this kingdom involves being **adopted** into God's family, God is their Father. Those who are the good seed, believers, know the sower as their **Father**. They are sons of the kingdom, rightful members of the kingdom.

That's the good seed. But living **together** with the good seed in this field are weeds, not sown by **God**, but verses 38 and 39 say they are sown by the **devil**, the enemy, the evil one. The weeds sown by the evil one.

Contrary to the man that said the world is made of three types of people – those who can count, and those who **can't** (!), there are only **two** types according to the Bible, those who follow **Christ** - the good seed, and those who follow the **evil** one, the devil, the weeds. [Omit if no non-believers -And straight away if you're not a

follower of Jesus, that might make you a little uneasy, even angry. Please keep listening – there is good news to come. But you may be thinking ‘I’m a good person at heart, I’ve never done anyone any harm, I may have told a little lie here and there, and I may have not looked after my budgie as I ought, but I’ve never killed anyone or been nasty in any way. I resent being called a child of the devil! How dare you!’]

Jesus himself said in chapter 12, ‘*He who is not **with** me is **against** me.*’ To be a son of the kingdom, you must be **for** Jesus, you must believe that he is the Son of God, that he loves you and **gave** himself for you. That’s what it means to be for Jesus. Being a son of the evil one means that you’re **not** a believer (yet), you **don’t** recognise Jesus as Lord and Saviour (yet). You’re not for Jesus, you’re against him.

Jesus talks about it in another way in John’s gospel, chapter 14:21, where we read, ‘*Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.*’ To be good seed, to be a member of the kingdom of heaven, to be a believer, to be for Jesus, and for Jesus to love us and show himself **to** us, we need to hear God’s commands and obey them.

There are only two positions you can be in this evening – for or against Jesus. Good seed or weeds in this parable. Where do you stand at the moment? For or against?

I say ‘at the moment’, because this isn’t the end of the story, because the good news is that the harvest hasn’t **arrived** yet. Jesus says in verse 39 that the harvest will happen at the end of the age, and we’ll come back to that a little later. The harvest hasn’t **come** yet, and we have to ask ourselves why **not**? If Jesus has brought in the kingdom when he rose victoriously from the dead, why hasn’t he brought it in **fully** straight away? There are two different types of seed, good seed and weeds, sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one, but at the moment they’re **together** in the same field. Why is this allowed to **continue**?

When asked by the servants in the story in verse 28, ‘*Do you want us to go and pull them up?*’ why does the owner of the field say, ‘*No ... let both grow together until the harvest.*’ in verse 30? Surely he could have got rid of the problem **then**, straight away, couldn’t he? **Why delay destroying the weeds**, the evil influence?

Why is there evil in the world still **today**? Why is there so much wrongdoing? If God is an all-powerful God, if he’s begun bringing in his kingdom of heaven, surely he could have brought it in once and for all, couldn’t he? The complete and perfect kingdom could have been brought in there and then as Jesus rose, 5

and he could have done away with all evil forever, just with a word. If God created the **world** he could have got rid of evil before now. So why **does** he allow the evil to continue?

In the parable the answer is given in verse 29: *'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.'* The weeds referred to here may be 'darnel' which was a weedy rye grass, which apparently could be easily mistaken for wheat in the early stages of growth. And this would be intertwined with the wheat.

But the great **hope** here is that some of today's weeds may become tomorrow's wheat. And this is the wonderful **news** here. This is why the evil are allowed to co-exist with sons of the Kingdom. We've already said that God is compassionate and faithful, slow to anger and abounding in love, and because of this, because of his character, because God is love, he is delaying the **harvest**. He is **delaying** the destruction of the weeds.

God says in the Bible (Ezekiel 18:32), *'For I take **no pleasure** in the death of **anyone** ... repent and live!'* God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, he wants men, women and children everywhere to turn to him and have a **relationship** with him. That's why he's given us the **Bible**, which reminds us that for thousands of years, from the beginning of time, he's been so keen that **everyone** should know who he is. The message continues today – that's why **I'm** here. God takes no pleasure in the death of **anyone**, turn to him and be saved.

That's the reason why God delays the harvest. Peter writes in his second letter about this harvest referred to, he talks about the Day of the Lord, and he says this: *'But don't forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as **some** understand slowness. He is **patient** with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance.'* 2 Peter 3:8-10.

Time means little to God because he is **forever**, a thousand years are like a day. But he is being patient, because he doesn't want anyone to perish – he'd much prefer everyone to turn to him and be saved. He wants weeds to become **wheat**. He's being patient and giving time to repent, to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and become **good** seed, sons and daughters of the Kingdom of heaven. *'He who has ears, let him hear.'* Are you listening? Are you hearing?

Of course it follows from this that in a **way** we Christians have a part to play in the **timing** of the harvest. We don't **know** when that will come,

but the more people we tell, the more people are given the opportunity to repent and turn to God, perhaps this could **speed** that time. Only God knows.

The thing that **is** certain is that the harvest **will** come. That's **certain**. The seed has been sown, both the good seed and the weedy seed, it is **inevitable** that the harvest has got to come some time in the future. **We** enjoy growing some of our own vegetables. This year we tried onions. In the Spring we planted the seeds in the greenhouse; we planted them out into the garden, and eventually they grew. We had a good crop and beautiful onions. But some **didn't** grow, they had the **leaves**, but not the actual onions, they were just thrown away. But once those seeds were sown, they were destined to be **harvested** – and either eaten, or destroyed. The seed is sown – harvest **will** come.

What does Jesus tell us in this story about what will happen to the wheat and the weeds?

Harvest **is** coming. At the moment good crops and weeds exist side by side. Believers and non-believers co-exist. Good and evil together. But at **harvest** time they will face completely different outcomes.

We learn about the destination of the weeds first: verse 40: *'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

Make no mistake, for those who do **not** turn to God, for those who have **rejected** the claims of God, for those who have preferred to go their **own** way rather than God's, for those who have remained **weeds** rather than becoming good seed, the harvest is **not** something they should be looking forward to. Jesus tells us it will be a **horrific** event. You could hardly describe it in more terrifying ways, could you? – pulled up, burned in the fire, weeded out, thrown into the fiery furnace, to spend **eternity** weeping and gnashing teeth. Not a nice prospect.

Remember, it's **not** too late. God is being **patient**, not wanting anyone to perish. The weeds of yesterday can turn out to be the good crop of tomorrow. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, *'I tell you, now is the time of God's **favour**, now is the day of salvation.'* God's waiting for a **response**. One day it **will** be too late – harvest will come, then there's no going back. I urge you not to delay – turn to God and be saved.

But what of the **good** seed? What of the sons of the kingdom?

'Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father,' verse 43. The sons of the kingdom will reflect the brightness of the **glory** of their Father. What a wonderful and **glorious** prospect in store for those who belong to the King of the Kingdom of heaven. The harvest will come when Jesus comes again to bring his kingdom in fully.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read: *'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'* And when Jesus returns, we shall see him as he is, and we shall be **like** him. What a glorious future we have to look forward to, if we are **his**.

Two types of seed. Two different destinations. How will the harvest find us? Good seed and fruitful? Or weeds and only ready to be destroyed?

In summary then, let's just round this off. We've seen that this story is applicable to us **now** – the time between Jesus rising from the dead and his coming again; we've looked at the two kinds of seed in the field – two kinds of people in the world – those who believe in the saving work of Jesus on the cross, and those who don't - those **for** Jesus and those against; we've read about the two contrasting destinations of the seed – in the kingdom of heaven or outside forever.

What this story requires is a response – where do we stand in relation to Jesus? *'He who has ears, let him hear.'*