

Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Prayers, Readings, Reflection and Song.

“Welcome to another short act of worship for the Parish Church of St Martin. For those who are able to follow it as written or listen in, I hope it offers some comfort, encouragement and a sense of being together despite the distance between us.” Rev Jonny



*Be still, and draw yourself closer to the God who rests beside you,
before you and within you.*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit.

All **Amen.**

The Lord be with you

All **And also with you**

My brothers and sisters,
as we prepare to celebrate the presence of Christ
in word and sacrament,
let us call to mind and confess our sins.

In the wilderness we find your grace;
you love us with an everlasting love.

Lord, have mercy.

All **Lord, have mercy.**

There is none but you to uphold our cause;
our sin cries out and our guilt is great.

Christ, have mercy.

All **Christ, have mercy.**

Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed;
restore us and we shall know your joy.

Lord, have mercy.

All **Lord, have mercy.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

The Collect for the day

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Gospel Reading, from Matthew 13

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

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." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 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!

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to you, O Christ**

Reflection

I don't know about you, but this parable always gets me a little bit hot under the dog-collar. Like so much of Matthew's gospel, this focus on final judgement. On Good vs evil. On sorting the wheat from the weeds and throwing the unwanted stuff into everlasting fire. I have to say I struggle with it. And this parable is a prime example.

It sounds devoid of compassion, forgiveness, grace. The farmer in this parable doesn't sound like the God I have come to know through Jesus Christ. I prefer the God of unquenchable love, not the one of unquenchable fire.

If I were to read it in a purely historical context I might reflect that Matthew's own community, clinging to following the teachings of Jesus in the perilous times following the Roman destruction of the temple in 70AD, was hyper-conscious of divisions and disputes within its own ranks.

This might explain why Matthew is so keen to focus on Jesus' teaching about rightness and wrongness and about sorting the one from the other. That might give me some comfort. But that also sounds like I'm trying to just explain away anything difficult in the bible in the hope it doesn't apply to me. And if there's one thing I love about the bible is that the wisdom within it isn't fixed to one point in time, but echoes down the ages and is relevant today; if only we have eyes to see it and ears to hear.

So maybe there is more mercy in this passage than I am giving it credit for. Maybe I'm being too distracted by all the talk of weeds and fires and devils. If I'm not careful I will miss the loving kindness that Jesus talks about.

Firstly, in using this analogy of Weeds and Wheat, Jesus is recognising that it is never obvious who or what is tainted by evil. The Greek word Matthew uses for weeds is **zizania**. Those hearing this word would have known he meant darnel – a weed very similar to wheat in appearance, but only when the ears finally swell, the wheat droops down and the darnel remains upright. The weeds and the wheat look very alike, and it's only in the fullness of maturity that even a trained farmer can begin to tell the difference. For a long time as they grow, weeds will look like wheat and wheat will look like weeds.

So don't be hasty, says the Lord. Don't judge too soon. Don't rush to pull out what you think to be weeds and in so doing damage the wheat crop. How many times have I written someone off, or cast aspersions after a first meeting. To understand someone fully requires a life-time or careful study and generous space to grow. That is what Jesus is calling for us to remember.

And in that time, that time for growth, things change. What we once thought wholesome may later appear to be unhealthy. What once was perceived as weak and unappealing may in fact be a precious source of

nourishment. Give people a chance to grow and mature, because God can do so much in the life-time of a person.

And give yourselves a chance to grow too. I do believe that one day I will stand face-to-face before my Lord. But I can let the judgement wait until that day – sure in the hope that my Lord is a loving and merciful God above all else. In the meantime, what use is it to judge myself too swiftly and too harshly? Self-criticism, self-damnation even, is too easily grasped as a route to righteousness. How futile that is when we remember that God made us, and God knows us and God loves us? Far better to get on with loving and being kind to ourselves and others as we grow in our faith and into our full humanity.

But of course we do know a bit about the world of which Jesus speaks. We know that there are horrendous expressions of evil in our world. And that there are lives that are grotesquely mutated by evil. We know too that capacity within each of ourselves for good and evil. We know, when we really think about it, that there are wheat and weeds at growth within us now, and likely there will be right up until our end.

God knows that too, and Jesus' words here must resonate with that awareness. When the harvest comes, God will not gather back to himself anything that did not first come from him. He will call his harvest home, free from the weeds, and delight that the wheat seed he planted has come to full growth.

I like that idea. God cares about the life-giving wheat inside me, so much so that he will labour even at the end of my days to weed out all those stubborn roots that I have clung to for too long. Maybe only if I stand back and let God do this work in me can I ever shine like the sun in my Father's Kingdom.

Amen

Song

**Take, O take me as I am;
Summon out what I shall be;
Set your seal upon my heart
And live in me.**

gently

Take, O take me as I am; sum- mon out what I shall be;

5
set your seal up - on my heart and live in me.

Prayers of Intercession

*Pray for one another – those in our church community
Pray for the Parish, the Island and the World
Pray for the sick, the isolated, the anxious and depressed
Pray for the dying, and those who mourn
Pray for yourselves, and for your own needs*

Lord in your mercy
All Hear our prayer

The Intercessions may end as follows

Merciful Father
**All Accept these prayers
for the sake of your son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Peace

Peace to you from God our heavenly Father.
Peace from his Son Jesus Christ who is our peace.
Peace from the Holy Spirit, the life-giver.
The peace of the triune God be always with you

All **and also with you.**

All Let us pray with confidence, as our Saviour taught us

Our Father

who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen.

The Blessing.

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**