

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July

## Read Matthew 13.24-30, 36-40

### Reflection

### Faith Darch (Reader)

Jesus' disciples asked him to explain the parable of the weeds and he did. Do I need to add anything?

Two thoughts occurred to me when I reread this parable. Surely, at harvest time, pulling up the weeds would still uproot the wheat? And who are the servants?

Perhaps it was obvious to the disciples that the servants of the householder were themselves, and all those who listened to the story, and us too. For the disciples, and the crowd listening then, and we in our turn, all want to ask God, 'Why does evil appear in the world and why do you allow it to persist?' So Jesus' parable deals with our question: if God is good and has created a good world and humans in his image, how come there is evil? Jesus' answer is "an enemy", the devil. Or, as James says, "one is tempted by one's own desire" (James 1:14). Whichever way you look at it, evil is not of God's doing. The bad news is that evil is not going to be dealt with *now*. We must live in a world that has evil in it. The good news is that God is well aware of it and it will be rooted out.

Why not pull the weeds up as soon as they sprout? If you have 2 tiny plants growing closely together, pulling up the weed may uproot the one you want to keep. Also, when plants are very small, it's often hard to identify them. Is that a wheat stalk, or a rogue grass? It might be easy to pull up the wrong one! But at harvest time, they are easy to tell apart: the wheat has ears of grain and turns golden; the thistle has thorns and thistledown. Moreover, pulling up the weeds at harvest time is no longer a problem: the wheat itself is about to be harvested and won't need its roots any more.

Does the fate of the weeds trouble us? Where, we ask, is the mercy and forgiveness of God? Firstly, the parable deals with just one question: why evil, and will it ever be sorted? Jesus doesn't complicate the point he's making by talking here of repentance and forgiveness. Bad people can become good people; but in the horticultural world, weeds don't turn into wheat. Secondly, he talks about removing "all causes of sin and evildoers". "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) but are redeemed by the grace of Jesus through the cross. I'd suggest that the "evildoers" mentioned here are those who, "at the end of the age", reject the mercy and forgiveness that is offered.

God alone knows when it will be best to sort out the evil in the world. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God "is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance." We, like the servants, may be too eager to label someone as a 'weed' and want them sorted out, or be keen to do the sorting ourselves. But we can't always tell the wheat from the weeds. We don't see people's potential, nor love them as God loves them. And, unlike thistles and brambles, human 'weeds' can, with the love of God, turn into beautiful and fruitful plants that belong in the gardens of heaven.

As a plant that is often weedy myself, I'm very glad of that. Aren't you?