

☺ *So there's this man walking along the road when he sees another man digging in the most beautifully neat and wonderfully tended garden. He says "Isn't it great what God and man can do together". The Gardener looks up and with a wry smile says "yes, but you should see the mess he makes of it when left by himself".*

This morning we come to the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds
It is a story in three parts: the sowing of the seeds, the way it matures, the harvest at the end.
So my 3 points *could be* Sowing, Growing and Mowing ☺
But that's just way too cheesy!

Parables are human stories with spiritual applications.
They have a way of tweaking our imagination,
of inviting us to become a part of the story,
of getting us to work at their meaning.

And because the meaning is very often challenging and uncomfortable,
Parables get us to think about the point **before** we decide to accept or reject it.
Parables *are like spiritual Exocets*, they travel under the radar, and you only see the target as they hit home

The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds is about the reality of the world we live in.
It talks about
Two attitudes towards God
Two purposes in our lives
Two destinies for our soul.

So if you would, would you turn with me to Matthew chapter 13, p979 of our pew Bibles, and we'll unpack it together.
I want to talk about two attitudes, two purposes and two destinies.

Jesus says, firstly, that

1. There are two attitudes towards God in our world.

v24 The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away".

Jesus says there two types of seed in our world:
The good seed, the wheat – who are the children of the Kingdom of God; and
The weeds – who are the children of the evil one

Now whichever way we look at that – this is a pretty controversial, even offensive thing to say!

Indeed if you or I said those words -
if we went up to someone and said
your attitude to God belongs in the same camp as the devil –
you are a child of the evil one!
(this is NOT something I recommend)

At BEST they would say
who do you think you are,
how can you believe such offensive and insulting thing!
At worst
They may simply punch us on the nose!
And you can see their point.
We have no authority: moral, legal or otherwise to say such things.

But then again, it isn't you or me saying this.

These are Jesus' words.

And truth be told,

Jesus has a bit more collateral to draw on than us...

Jesus is the one whose teaching is profoundly loving towards the marginalised, the outcasts the excluded in society.

He is the one who lives and dies a life of self-sacrifice for others

He is the one who works tirelessly to break-down barriers between people

So if Jesus is saying this, then it's worth working out what he is actually saying

And he is saying two things.

1.1 Firstly, not everybody is a child of God.

Our problem is that we are used to thinking that **EVERBODY** is a child of God.

"Surely what makes us human **IS** that we are all children of God", you might say

And in the sense that God made us, that we all come from him, that we are in his image – then that's true – we **ARE** all children of God.

But in the sense

that we are all wanting to be in a living relationship with God as Father,

that we all want to acknowledge that he **IS** our Creator

that we all accept him as Lord of our life –

well that's not true and many people don't *want it* to be true!

Many people don't live, and don't want to live, in any meaningful relationship with God (knowing who he is, and what he is like: his presence to guide, his strength to hold, his love to power us)

Many people don't believe that God is our Creator; and

Many people certainly don't want to live with God, as Lord, as Boss, as the central point of their life.

So the reality is –

that not everybody **IS**, or **WANTS TO BE** – a child of God.

In that sense.

In the sense of wanting him to be their Father, their Creator, their Lord

and the second thing that Jesus is saying is that therefore

1.2 Many are children of the evil one.

Now this is a hard phrase to swallow.

How dare he?

But listen, Jesus is saying this:

That Satan's message is very clear.

live independently of God, be your own God, be your own Lord,

Do what **you** think is right, live the life **you** think is best, follow your **own** path.

That is Satan's message!

It is exactly how he lives,

it is exactly what he said to the very first humans (choose your own path, do what you think is right, do what you think is best),

it is exactly what he says to you and me, to our friends, and to society at large (live independently of God)

And that is exactly what many people do...

In other words

There are people whose attitude towards God is in the same camp as Jesus' "You are my Father, My Lord, My God"

There are people whose attitude towards God is in the same camp as the Devil "I want to live independently from you, to do what I think is best, to choose my own path".

You see the reason why its hard to hear the words “you are children, in the same camp, as the evil one”
Is because the world either portrays Satan as a semi-comical figure with pitch-fork and pointy tail – he is caricatured and so is an irrelevant joke.

OR - the exact opposite –

He is the personification of everything that is malignant, harmful and utterly repugnant –
and therefore he is someone we would NEVER associate ourselves with.

But its not like that at all.

Satan is both NO comedy figure –

And HE DOES NOT see himself as an evil terrorist –

he sees himself as a freedom-fighter.

He sees himself as one of the ‘good guys’, an angel of light, hard-done by,
as someone who simply wants to live:

Outside of the rule of God... and

Outside the Kingdom of God.

And in that sense he shares the same values, as everyone in this world who has chosen the same...

to live independently of God, to be their own God, to be their own Lord,

to do what is right in their own eyes, to live the way they think is best, to follow their own path.

Do you see?

We are either in Satan’s camp – following his philosophy towards God: “live independently of God”

Or we are in the Kingdom of God camp – because we accept his rule.

So the first point of the parable is to simply ask.

Who are we?

What path have we chosen?

Whose ideological are we following?

Because there are only two attitudes.

to live with ourselves as Lord in our own life’ or

to live with God as Lord in our life

to live the way we think is best, or

to live the way God thinks is best

to follow our own path or

to follow God’s path?

That’s the first challenge of the parable,

The second challenge is “well how can you tell?”

How can you tell who is who?

who has chosen what?

The answer is: by their sense of purpose.

2. Because Secondly, People have one of two purposes in their life

The purpose of wheat is to flourish and produce more wheat.

As Ray said last week, the purpose of seed is to grow and produce more seed.

How can you tell the difference between someone ‘who is Lord of their own life’

And someone ‘who has made Jesus Lord of their own life’?

By their fruit, by what they are trying to leave behind.

v26 Only when the wheat had sprouted and formed heads, did the weeds become apparent.

You see, up to that point, up to the point before the fruit began to show, you just couldn’t tell the difference between the weeds and the wheat.

They say “*If it looks like a duck, and walks like a duck and talks like a duck... then it’s a duck*” – well Jesus said that’s not necessarily so!

You have to wait to the fruit begin to show to tell what it is.

The word that Jesus uses for weeds is “ziz-anion” <*>

Here is a picture of it.

It’s a sort of rye-grass.

It’s as tall as wheat,

It’s grows like wheat and

It looks like wheat

Here’s a picture of wheat.

They are pretty much indistinguishable from each other until the fruit is formed and the ears appear.

And then you know.

For the seeds of ziz-anion are black and they are no good for food

And the fruit of the wheat is golden and sustains life

But you can’t tell by simply looking at the plant’s size and shape and colour

You need to look carefully at the fruit.

My favourite Scientist is a man called Dr Heinz Wolf. <>*

*He just looks like, how you imagine a scientist **should** look.*

I remember watching him give a lecture about the importance of observing details to a bunch of wide-eyed medical students.

He took out a small bottle <>and announced that it contained a sample of urine and that it’s often possible to determine the patient’s illness by tasting their urine.”*

Holding it high, he dipped his finger into the tube and then into his mouth as he continued: “Now I am going to pass this bottle around.

Each of you please do exactly as I did.

Perhaps we can learn the importance of observing details.”

The bottle makes its way up and down the rows - each student carefully dipping their finger into it and bravely sampling the contents with a mixture of disgust and concentration.

*Dr. Wolf then retrieves the bottle and said “Ladies and Gentlemen, now you will understand what I mean when I speak about details: Had you been observant, you would have seen that I put my index finger into the bottle but actually my **middle finger** into my mouth”*

The way we can tell whether something is a weed or wheat is by looking carefully at the fruit.

Jesus says by their “fruit you shall know them”.

So if the purpose of wheat is to grow fruit that produces more wheat

Then the fruit of someone who is in a living relationship with God,

who has accepted God as Creator, and

knows God as Father, and

follows God as Lord

is to help others do the same.

A wheat crop produces wheat seed.

A child of the kingdom of God seeks to help other become children of the kingdom of God

The fruit of a relationship with God tastes of “love & joy & peace & patience & kindness & gentleness and self-control” but its purpose is to produces more people in the same sort of relationship with God.

The fruit of the spirit’s presence in our life **tastes** of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness.

But its prime purpose is to produce more people who know God's presence like that too.
That's how you tell.

Now this is a huge challenge for us.

For what it means is, that as individuals and as a church,
we should taste of "love and joy and peace and kindness"
but our purpose is to help others to find a living, life-transforming relationship with God.

When the wheat is **immature** you can't tell the difference between it and the weeds around it
But when the wheat matures you can tell the difference through the seeds

In the same way both "believers" and "non-believers" can be indistinguishable in how kind and good and respectable and lovely they are
That's not the difference
The difference is in their purpose.

When we get what a relationship with God is really like,
when we mature as Christians our purpose and our passion, the thing that drives us, and sets our priorities is that others might find in God that same relationship that we have found.

Sure we should taste of love and self-sacrifice, of goodness and kindness, or peace and patience
but our passion, our purpose, our desire - **the seed** - is to plant something that will last forever in other people's lives.

This morning, I recognise I stand before a church that has made an enormous sacrifice to invest in mission.
You have created the possibility of having a town-centre town-wide ministry – you've seen that and valued that, you've got it, and said that is part of our purpose as church
You have allowed the possibility of establishing a new congregation, – you've seen that and valued that, you've got it, and said that is part of our purpose as church
and to make that happen, you've had to make it a priority in your life!

You have said to God: we, (we Southover) we will make our purpose, our priority to share what we have with others.
Sure, we want this fellowship to taste of "love and joy and peace and kindness" (sure, that's absolutely core to who we are)
but our purpose is to help others find a living, life-transforming relationship with God so that **they** may know his peace, his love, his joy in their life too!

The sacrifice that we make, the time we offer, the bank statement of where we spend our money are all evidences of the passion, the purpose of God in our life. It is the seed, the maturity that God is looking for.

And the more we mature in Christ the more this passion reveals itself:
at first you can't tell the difference between believer and non-believer
at first you can't tell the difference between the tares and the wheat
But then look at the purpose, see where they invest their money, their time, the focus of their prayers...
that shows the difference.

The servants said v28 – "shall we separate all the tares as soon as possible"

And God says:

No, Let both attitudes (those that want me as Lord – and those that don't) grow up together, side by side, the wheat and the tares.

Let both purposes reveal themselves in people's lives (one purpose: to grow God's Kingdom, the other not to),

Let that purpose be revealed in their bank accounts, in the way they spend their time, in the way they pray
Let the fruit become clear, let the evidence be there

Are they mission focussed. or not
So that at the harvest we shall know.

This is what this parable is all about
It is about the choices we make;
It is about our attitude to God
It is about our purpose; and
It's also about the destination.

Because thirdly,

3. There ARE Two Destinies.

If the choir would forgive this illustration, because they have heard it too many times!

*There is a story of Albert Einstein being on a train, going to an out-of-town engagement.
The conductor comes up to punch his ticket
and the great scientist, preoccupied with his work,
with great embarrassment, begins to rummage around in his coat pockets – but to no avail -
He can't find his ticket.
So the conductor said, "Well, we all know who you are, Dr. Einstein. I'm sure you bought a ticket.
Don't worry about it. Everything is okay."*

*The conductor walks on down the aisle punching other people's tickets.
But when he looks back, he sees Dr. Einstein down on his hands and knees looking under his seat
trying to find his ticket.
He comes back and gently says, "Dr. Einstein, please don't worry. I know who you are, I'm sure you've
bought a ticket."
Einstein looks up and says "I too know who I am".
"What I don't know is where I'm going!"*

It's important to know our destination.

In fact it is the single most important piece of information for the whole of our existence – bar none.
Isn't it true that we knew for certain, if we knew right now, for certain what would happen to us after death –
it would an incredible impact on our life!

Well Jesus tells us,
In this parable he tells us
He says in the end, the choices we make define who we are and what we want.

Listen, a weed is called a weed –
not because it is horrible
but because it is growing somewhere where it does not belong.

That's what the definition of a weed is.
You can have the most beautiful rose nestling in a vineyard - and it would be a weed.
Because its not where it belongs.

Someone who doesn't want God as God in their life, doesn't want God as King, as Lord –
doesn't want to be in the Kingdom of Heaven.
Because the Kingdom of Heaven is the place where God is King.
They would be like a fish out of water.

So the challenge of this parable and Exocet that has our name on it is to ask
what is it that you want,
who is it that you want?
And if you don't want God as Lord now

If you don't choose to have a living relationship with God now
If you don't kneel and bow before him now
If you don't make his Lordship direct your life now
Now when you have a choice,
Now when you are free to reject him
You won't want it then, except under duress of the fact that you'll realise that it's all true

And if you don't want God now then
then ahead of us there is death, nothing, annihilation – at best,
at worst - an eternity living independently of the goodness of God forever...

But that is not what God wants
That is not what you have been made for
You have been made for a place, v41, which is free from every evil and every cause of evil
You have been made for a place where there is no brokenness,
where there is no crying, or mourning or pain.
You have been made for heaven, if you choose to bow your head before God

Do you know how the workers in Jesus' time would separate the wheat from the Tares? <>
As the wheat ripens and the grain swells, the head would get very heavy and under this weight the head would bow.*

The Tares – they stand straight and upright.

So the workers would go through the field, first removing all the plants that stand proud without the heavy grain and they would leave all those plants whose head was bowed...

And then, and then they would bring the harvest home.

God has given each of us the opportunity in this life
to flourish and to bear fruit
Fruit that will bring others into a living relationship with God
Fruit that will make a difference forever
Fruit that will taste of love
This is our mission and purpose.

This morning the Sower has done his sowing.
Now you must choose the seed you will be
the passion of your purpose
the destiny that you want.
Jesus said "he who has ears, let him hear"

Prayer...

about God as Lord

about our Passion for Mission

about our Hope of Heaven.