

This week's Parable of the Darnel (or 'the wheat and the tares') is unique to Matthew, following last week's Parable of the Sower. Here, too, the setting is agricultural: farming was the principal occupation of those in Palestine at the time. Just as last week, today's parable attempts to answer the underlying question of the previous chapter: why is Jesus failing to win over the people of Israel?

'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to ...' This is another kingdom parable, dealing with God's judgement at the end of time. A man who sowed good seed in his field The attention of the listeners is caught straight away. It would be unusual for a landowner, who we learn has slaves, to have done the sowing himself. While his men were sleeping This rich owner, able to grow wheat rather than the more ordinary barley, was very lax. It would have been expected that he would have protected his land. 'An enemy has done this' Another unusual element to keep the audience alert. The owner knows that the weeds have not occurred naturally but have been put in by an enemy. when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also the 'weeds' are most probably darnel with poisonous seeds, which looks remarkably like wheat as it grows. Only at maturity does the difference between the two become apparent. The ear of the wheat droops, heavy with grain, whereas the ear of the darnel, with its very light seeds, remains upright. Darnel grows freely in Israel and was the bane of a farmer's life at a time when there were no weed killers. ... lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them Sowing was done by hand and not in neat rows, so the roots would have been entangled; pulling out one would disturb the other. As the Book of Leviticus decrees, 'you are not to sow two kinds of grain in your field' (19: 19): the field itself would then become impure, and simply removing the weeds would not be enough to satisfy the Law. At harvest time the good and the bad will be separated at the Final Judgement. The darnel will be burnt. Fire is often used as a purifier in the Old Testament (see Malachi 3: 3).

At this time of year harvesting and the conditions for harvesting are on the minds of many in this community and the surrounding area. Adapting to the changes of the climate including wildfires, political climate coupled with loneliness and isolation are some of today's challenges alongside succession farming in families is often a task that the young are unwilling to take on.

We don't have to be connected to farming culture to be able to explore this parable together. The Gospel presents us with three parables; all concerned with growth. The main one, about the weeds growing amidst the wheat, can be applied to our own lives, to the world around us and to the Church. God is patient, slow to judge. We can count on his mercy.

Interrogating this parable Jesus is giving me the opportunity to ask myself what special meaning does it have for me personally? With whom and with which part of the story do I identify? ... the person who sowed the seed and whose enemy planted the weeds? Or the person who trusted enough to let wheat and weeds to grow together? ... the servants who wanted to pull up the weeds and maybe damage the wheat? ...

Certainly inheriting the rectory garden, I can identify with both of these two .. knowing where to get started and if its safe to plant anything given the amazing wildlife around me is a challenge worth thinking through and one which I would welcome advice on as harming either the animals, plants or the soil is one which I want to avoid and at the same time wanting to continue creating a sustainable environment where everything can thrive and this might include nettles and weeds.

We also might want to think if we have the capacity to be the enemy who sometimes sabotages someone else's plans and how different we could be once we have reflected on this part of ourselves not being from God or consider who are adversaries are and how we might want to change this situation for good?

Perhaps I remember past events where this applied, or maybe I find it relevant to my life today. I can ponder my reactions and speak to the Lord of this. What graces do I wish to ask for this week with regard to myself, or as I contemplate the world around me, my family members, neighbours, colleagues and friends in the light of these growth parables ? Seeking greater tolerance, or patience, or trust, or compassion for others and myself is one which we can all ask God to help us with as going it alone is not an option.

May we ask the Lord to help us to look on others with kindness, as we would wish them to treat us and seek out how we might grow and develop. Amen