

## Trinity 5 St Marylebone 11am

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

Last Sunday, followed by an excellent sermon from Fr Edward, we heard the familiar Parable of the Sower<sup>1</sup>, or the Parable of the Soils, which might be a more accurate description.

One sower, one type of seed, but soil varying from the rough and weed-filled to deep rich productive loam.

This morning, we have heard another of Jesus' agricultural stories, a sister parable to the Parable of the Soils: the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds<sup>2</sup>: two seed stocks this time, rather than one; two sowers in place of the single sower, but just one common soil, which seems to be both rich and productive and equally kind to weeds as to wheat.

In an agrarian society, like that of first century Galilee, those who first listened to Jesus' stories have understood all about soil and sowers and seed and the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13.1-22

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13.24-30 & 36-43

all too real difficulties of recognizing weeds from wheat, at least during their earliest stages of growth.

Like the Parable of the Soils, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds is a telling sharply-focused story about the end time; the time when the fullness of God's Kingdom will be revealed and God's final judgement made between good and bad, light and darkness.

Some sects have chosen to interpret the parable as an indictment of the Church and those who comprise it: a single soil in which good and bad believers grow up side by side to be sorted and sifted only at the end of time.

Preparing for this sermon, I discovered that, for Jehovah's Witnesses<sup>3</sup>, among others, this parable is a key text.

For them, obsessed with dates and numbers, the sowing of the seed takes place at Pentecost in 33 AD; the inspection and the beginning of the harvest between 1914 and 1919, from which point onwards, the so-called 'Anointed' ones have gone out in pairs from door to door sifting and sorting wheat from weeds, gathering-in the chosen and the 'elect' in preparation for the great

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org)

tribulation of Armageddon, which will see the downfall of Christendom, comprised as it is of the damned 'weeds' Jehovah has allowed to grow among the elect 'wheat'.

It was a similar unshakeable confidence in knowing who was saved and who was not, which drove me out of the Christian Union at school and away from the Baptist faith of my childhood into the arms of the Church of England.

Who are we to judge between 'wheat' and 'weeds' in Christ's Church. Indeed, does Jesus not warn his hearers again and again about judging lest their judgement rebound on themselves?<sup>4</sup>

The truth is that the world, the Church, the Kingdom in its unfolding, is a very mixed field; saints and sinners, good and bad all grow together.

Take a good look around you at your fellow worshippers this morning: look very carefully at the young and the old, the wise and the not-so-wise, the rich and the poor, the white and black. Can you tell saint from sinner, 'weed' from 'wheat'?

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7.1

Indeed, can you even tell who you are this morning, which category you fall into, as we listen together to Jesus' parables?

It is not only the 'world', or the 'Church' or even this congregation that is an amalgam of good and evil, each and every one of us is nothing if not a complicated and contrary mix.

Remember St Paul's wonderfully self-critical analysis, I just don't understand; the good that I wish to do, I don't do. The evil that I don't wish to do, that's precisely what I end up doing!<sup>5</sup>

Jeremiah, writing at the time of the fall of Jerusalem 600 years before Jesus says, "More tortuous than anything is the human heart; it is beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merits of his deeds."<sup>6</sup>

Only God knows us for who we really are. Only God knows our brother and our sister.

God alone is both saviour and judge.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 7.15

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 17:9-10

God alone who searches and knows us down to the very last atom of our being and it is to God alone that all desires are known and from whom no secrets are hidden<sup>7</sup>. Who are we to read the deepest motivations of another's mind and the heart? Who are we to say who is 'wheat' and who is 'weed'?

"Let the wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest," says God, "with appearances so hard to judge and with root systems so entangled and entwined it is impossible to uproot one without uprooting the other".

Our friends might judge us to be better than we are and our enemies to be worse than we are; but only God knows the real me, the real him, the real her.

So, by God's grace and love we grow together, 'wheat' and 'weeds' until the final harvest is at last gathered in.

Unlike us, God is patient and merciful and full of love and unlike us, God wills that all might come to the knowledge of the truth and be safely gathered in.

If Simon Peter had been 'uprooted' and cast out when he denied his Jesus three times, could the Good News have been proclaimed to the Jews?

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<sup>7</sup> *Book of Common Prayer, 1662 Collect for Purity*

If Saul had been 'uprooted' and cast out as he watched the people of Jerusalem stone the deacon Stephen, could the Good News have been proclaimed among the Gentiles?

And what about Thomas, or Augustine or Francis of Assisi or Ignatius? What about us?

"Let them both grow till the harvest," says the sower, and when harvest comes, I am sure that there will be more than a few surprises!

Whosoever hath ears, let him hear!

Amen.