

Sermon for 19th July 2020 Trinity 6

I never thought I would ever say that Gardeners World would be one of my all time favourite tv programmes. I love the peacefulness and calmness of it; the beautiful photography and of course the pets which have featured in it in recent years. Not only Monty's dogs but now this last week we had presenter Adam Frost's beautiful black cat sitting on his shoulder like a parrot as he spoke to camera! If we go back to online again perhaps I will try that with our Sooty!!

Yes we have another agricultural parable this week. I was going to tell you about my weeds but actually Adam Frost was talking about something very interesting I thought, which was about 'no dig' gardening. Apparently you avoid digging the ground because it will destroy all the delicate infrastructure needed to nourish the plant's roots and enable things to grow and flourish. There is it seems a teeming life in that soil, much of which is not visible to the human eye!

Also it seems that when you dig over a piece of ground, if you don't quickly plant it up it will very quickly be covered with weeds; those pesky things which in our case are of a huge height now, and that bind weed which so cleverly wraps itself around anything in its path. I planted some cornflower seeds a few weeks ago - not the ones we gave to our single households as I don't qualify - I already had some. Anyway to my delight some have grown as I mentioned last week, not all, but I have quite a few now almost blooming. As I tried to pull out weeds next door to one plant though, the beautiful cornflower came out as well. And that of course is exactly what Jesus is talking about in his parable of the wheat and the tares or weeds.

Tares are in fact a weed which rather awkwardly bears a strong resemblance to wheat until the ears appear. They were known by the Greek - darnel. It was a very serious weed of cultivation until modern sorting machinery has enabled darnel seeds to be separated efficiently from wheat seed. It was also very poisonous but apparently it wasn't wasted in production but used in household fuel. Jesus says in the second part of the reading in his explanation of the parable that just as the weeds will be collected and burned up in fire so too all evil will be destroyed at the end of time.

The parable, because it is a parable, has many layers and we can understand it and hear it in many different ways. Jesus didn't use parables as a way just to explain things to people's satisfaction but to call attention to the unsatisfactory nature of the world. Like why is evil allowed to exist in the world? The evil being pictured here as the weeds planted by the enemy, the poisonous darnel; looks similar to the crop but as it develops it becomes noticeably different... with deadly consequences.

Sounds like evil doesn't it? The point of the parable is though that Jesus compares the kingdom to the life giving wheat but alongside it; a fact of life, is that someone has planted something unwanted, planned to damage the good crop. The servants want to go and gather their master's weeds up, but wisely he tells them to wait because in gathering the weeds they will uproot the wheat. Let them grow together until harvest time and then they can be safely separated.

It is a fact isn't it that in life there are so many wonderful things to enjoy but there is always the other side of life, where there are troubles, which seems to be ever present. We have to live with both aspects of life don't we. We learn to live with it, to try to root out wrongdoing where we can of course, but often there are the greyer areas where we have to be more patient, to let things run a bit longer in order to be sure not to do damage to the good, not to bring unnecessary ruin.

Bishop Andrew has written an excellent sermon on this parable for this week which will be online for those who would like to hear it. He highlights an important aspect of this parable I haven't focused on before which is patience and he speaks of a right patience and a right impatience.

Patience. A wonderful attribute isn't it. That ability to let things take their course without becoming annoyed or anxious. I think we all have patience for some things and not for others - for example I have nil patience with technology. I was speaking to a lovely wedding couple yesterday and the groom is an IT Consultant. I was asking him why our video files would take up to 9 hours on occasion to send to Dik for example. He explained that if we could have seen the band width during lockdown when everyone was using internet connections it would have looked like mud. I had to be patient!

We all had to be patient and continue to be patient during this health emergency haven't we? I remember my granddaughter on first hearing about the lockdown unable to understand how she would cope for weeks on end indoors. She learnt, we all learnt; we found creative ways to get round things and counted our blessings that we were healthy - as I always say 'so far, so good'. Isolating and isolated we have had to learn patience. To take comfort and inspiration in the small things close to home as many older and infirm people already do. People ill with coronavirus have had to be patient too as they were treated in hospital or recovered at home. The crisis has meant that there have been many setbacks in all our lives and in church we have had to take difficult decisions about how we have returned to worship together and to open our churches. Our young people's lives have been turned upside down and particularly with exams being cancelled and the outcomes of this. We and they may have to accept that 'it is what it is' as

we say these days and we just need to not let it get us down but to learn what we can from it and grow as a result.

We all yearn for certain things to be different in our lives and church and in our world. There are of course things that need to be sorted out straightaway and we can treat the little ups and downs that we all will have faced in this manner. But Jesus teaches that the bigger things will take time. Things like friendship and trust takes time. Education takes time. Growing in faith takes time and building God's kingdom takes time. However we have also learnt during this recent time that we cannot be complacent either. Certain acts of wrongdoing and plain evil have led to some difficult and challenging conversations for some. The Black Lives Matter movement has raised some significant questions about our society today and challenges us all about the ways in which Black, Asian and other ethnic minorities face often unspoken assumptions and prejudices that continually hold them back from achieving their fullest potential as human beings made in God's image.

So I find myself in agreement with our Bishop that there is a right patience and a right impatience in our lives and churches. I find I am currently impatient with anything that I think divides us or gets in the way of others finding their rightful place in our church family. So let's be patient with each other, with our friends and families, with the many that we might meet along the way and let this parable speak afresh to each one of us today in our own particular context and where we are on life's journey. There is no one correct way to hear scripture - God's Word inspired by the Holy Spirit speaks to us in different ways. And it all takes time. As Paul says the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now and we know how long labour can be! And we too groan inwardly he says while we wait for that which is not as yet seen, yet we are invited to help take care of our little bit of creation, knowing that we are also an integral part of it, created to flourish right where we are planted. God gardens with patience, encouraging us to know and cherish our part in his world. I find there is much wrong with our world and society which is not always clear cut. There are layers of complexity in all of our major issues that as humans we struggle with. Things that are not obvious to the human eye but which are unseen. A bit like our 'no dig' gardening - but God of course sees everything and will know the complexities of each piece of ground, situation and of course soil. He will guide us and give us patience if we will listen.

Amen.'