

Sermon 23rd July 2017. Isaiah 44: 6-8, Romans 8: 12-25 and Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

In today's gospel we hear the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The wheat represents the good people and the weeds those who are perceived as inherently bad. But let's rethink what weeds actually are. We all know that they are the bane of every gardener's life. Their roots grow so deep into the ground and it is hard to extract them. Some have little tiny roots that expand everywhere, others have stems so thick that just when you think you are pulling it out of the ground the stem snaps and a little bit remains in the ground. Weeding is back breaking work, but rewarding when you have a nice clear patch of ground, which is fertile and ready for planting with flowers or produce that we will enjoy or benefit from. Isn't this the same with bad people, they are part of God's created order and all that God produces is good. So something happens to good people that starts them on the road to bad things. Then like weeds they become a nuisance and something that society believes should be got rid of, we here this again in the gospel when the angels will come and remove what is bad for all time. So that's okay then we're sorted, the angels will sort out the good from the bad there is nothing for us to do. Think again, to truly live out the gospel it is our responsibility to find those that stray and bring them into God's family. I believe that it is our responsibility to be the farmers whilst we are in our earthly form, not so that we dispose of or ignore what is bad in people; but so that we can find the good that lies deep within those who are bad nurture it and help it too bear fruit.

There are two weeds that seem to annoy people the most. Firstly the stinging nettle and secondly the thistle. How many of us have been enjoying a nice stroll or doing a bit of weeding when we have been stung by a nettle or had a thistle stick its spiky points into us. Nettles can leave a nasty rash that itches and thistles can leave us with a strange feeling that can take awhile to fade. To us they are weeds to be destroyed to others they are inherently good and useful in herbal remedies which can be beneficial to the body. The thistle according to an article published in Ethnobotany in 2010, is a rich source of nutrients. When prepared and used properly, thistles can be a good source of fibre, protein, magnesium, copper and zinc, who knew that a humble thistle could be so good for us. The nettle can be used to make tea. When prepared properly nettle tea can be used as a diuretic, it can help with kidney and liver functioning. It is also a good source of iron, can help the digestive system, improve metabolism and ease the symptoms of the menopause. So what we see as a nuisance and a cause of pain for the majority of people, for a minority these two weeds hold beneficial properties. I am not advocating that we set aside conventional medicine or ignore medical advice, I am using something that is perceived to be bad to show that bad things can also contain good. Even the most vilest person will have buried inside of them something that is good that has been lost along their journey. Isn't it our responsibility to help find the good buried within bad people? So that they can start their lives again instead of writing them off as lost causes. Nothing is lost to God, so why should we see people as lost to us.

What I have just said seems so simple to do, but we all know that it isn't. For most of us there will be at least one person we have tried to help and yet nothing we do seems to make any difference. This doesn't mean we have failed just that we may not be the right person to help. When this happens we need to ask other members of the church family to step in and offer advice. In most families there is always one person we can confide in, someone we trust more than others, or someone we can connect with. It is the same for those who are struggling to good, fighting their own demons there will be someone who can help them turn their lives around. Sometimes this needs to be done gently, at others in what is seen as a

brutal and harsh way, it is the same with the weeds, sometimes a gentle tug others times the use of harsh chemicals is what's needed.

In life there will always be those people that like the weeds irritate and annoy us. What we have to do is look beyond the things that irritate us and find the good within the person, no matter how small that good is. When we shift our focus onto the positive things surrounding the person we will gain a deeper understanding of why they behave in a certain way. Just like peeling an onion when we begin to remove the various layers of a person's personality we may just find the best buried beneath the outer layers. When we have an understanding or awareness of the person's behaviour it can help us to be more forgiving and understanding, when we react to the person in a more positive light, we can hopefully have more positive interactions with them in the future. Sometimes we have to let go without resolving anything, this may be disappointing at the time but God is the beginning and end of all things, he is the first and the last the alpha and the omega and we can rest assured that our loving God will resolve all things when the time is right. When things are left unresolved we can still pray for a resolution, pray for the person that they will meet that one person or group of people that will help them turn their lives around. We may not have the capacity to heal the whole world, but that doesn't mean we should give up trying to heal our small part of it. One person's weed is another person's medicine and no I am not referring to the stuff that is grown and sold illegally, I mean the weeds that grow in the garden and that nature spreads of her own volition. Let us be true harvesters of the word seeking out and helping to rid the world of what is bad and helping it to become good. Let us try and encourage all who have hit a bad time in their lives turn things around and become fruitful and productive members of society, learning to love God and becoming fruit bearers of his word. God created nothing bad and that includes the weeds, even they have a purpose. We all need to feel we have a purpose in life, some people just need to work harder to find what that purpose is. As people who will God willing inherit the fruits of our labours let us make it our purpose to help others do the same.

Amen