

7TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Revd. Cara Heafey, Associate Minister, Summertown URC



Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

**READ:
MATTHEW
13:24-30, 36-43**

"Let anyone with ears
listen!"

REFLECT:

Today's passage follows on from last week's and is another of Jesus' agricultural parables. Last week we heard about good and bad soil; this week we hear of good and bad seed, of wheat and weeds.

I confess that my first reaction to Jesus' explanation of this story was aversion. Language about fiery destruction, weeping and gnashing of teeth, particularly when characterised as the fulfillment of God's purposes, can be difficult to stomach. As can a seemingly simplistic separation of the world and its people into "good" and "evil." Aren't we all far more complicated than that, and capable of both? One of the Psalms set by the lectionary for today certainly seems to acknowledge that we are (see Psalm 139:23-24).

Parables, though, invite us to go deeper. This story of Jesus' does challenge some of my liberal assumptions about God. It also has some beautiful nuggets of wisdom to deliver...

Acknowledging the existence of evil:

This parable and its explanation both refer to the presence and influence of evil in the world. Like the weeds in the story it is destructive and insidious; it can resemble what is good, so much so that we might mistake it.

Last week I watched a documentary (available on Netflix) called "Anne Frank: parallel lives." Its description of the Nazi concentration camps was a stark reminder, if one is ever needed, of the depth of evil humans are capable of. Looking at the world around us we can see we're surrounded and entangled still, with violence, cruelty, exploitation, greed and corruption. There may be times when we hear, from the lips of others or in our own hearts, that pain-filled question – "why does God let this happen?" This parable contains a promise: a day will come when justice will prevail, and evil be weeded out and destroyed.

Believing in human potential:

While evil is real and present, this story also teaches us that God is patient, and has faith in the potential of humans to be redeemed; to turn out to be wheat, rather than weeds, after all. There is also a warning to us: leave the judgement to God. Acknowledge evil, fight injustice, but don't try separating people into who is good and who is bad, who is in and who is out. We're liable to make mistakes, to do more damage than good. The story isn't over yet, there is still time for grace to do its redeeming work, for the Holy Spirit to breathe life and healing, for yet more surprising plot-twists in the unfolding drama of God's vast love for creation. Thanks be to God!

CONNECT:

Pray a simple prayer of confession using the words of the Psalmist:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Psalm 139:23-24

PRAY:

- For places and situations where evil seems to prevail
- For God to help us see potential, and the image of God, in every human life
- For those in our churches and communities experiencing grief, trauma, isolation or ill-health.
- For all who are struggling financially as a result of the virus and lockdown

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:
Rev. Pauline Main
Tel: 01865 513581 or 07931 305803
Rev. Cara Heafey
Tel: 01865 863053 or 07835 172206