

The wheat and the weeds

Matt.13.24-30 & 36-43

19.7.20

It's hard not to feel that we are lost in a forest of bad news at the moment. Just one glance at the headlines and we are propelled into the chaos of our new Covid-19 world order: ongoing loss and sadness for many families; the possibility of a coronavirus resurgence in the winter; confusion about masks; recession; and the impending disaster of the virus rampaging through already war-torn countries.

And that's all before you get to the non-Covid articles on the American election, racism, the underside of British gymnastics, and the murky world of Jeffery Epstein and his associates – to name just a few of the unsettling, sad, and bad stories we've been confronted with recently. It feels like goodness and light is being smothered by something much darker, or to use the imagery in Matthew's parable, it's as if someone has come into a field of wheat and sowed weeds everywhere. A field turned into a muddle, healthy wheat lost in a sea of wild, uncontrollable weeds.

It goes without saying that all of these news stories are very important and must be reported on. We need to know what's happening in our world. We need a Press that finds out, explains and critiques. But trying to process all that is happening, trying to reach for something other than despair, trying to work out how to respond to the weeds that are choking the world is difficult to say the least.

But, perhaps the rest of Matthew's story about the weedy wheat field communicates a deeper truth about the current sea of bad news. On viewing the state of his field, the farmer avoids a hasty reaction. He doesn't tear into the field ripping up the weeds desperately looking for wheat. He recognises that the wheat and the weeds have to coexist for a while. He can see that his field is altered, but it will need to remain in its altered state until the harvest.

Presumably, the farmer realises he will need to tend the wheat *and* the weeds for a while.

Jesus' parables are multi dimensional. This particular story was traditionally interpreted as a warning about the Last Judgement, when the wheat and weeds will be separated and evil will be punished. But it is at least as much about judgement deferred, supporting Jesus' own warning to 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'. (Matt.7.1) St Paul tells us that it is only God who will 'disclose the purposes of the heart' (1 Cor.4.5). However tempting it may be for us to start spotting who among our fellow humans is the sheep and who is the goat, we are urged to leave such decisions to God, who will indeed call us all to account, but in his own good time.

The fact is that we have to live with imperfection in our world and in our own lives too. We will all face judgement - because actions have consequences, whether they are personal actions which affect other people or social and corporate actions which affect the whole world we are a part of.

Heaven and Hell are not about what happens after we die, they are about what we create here on earth. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God – here and now! Are we following him, trying to live out his kingdom values of reconciliation, love, care for creation and each other? Or are we sometimes the weeds among the wheat?