

Reading: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The woman was beside herself. She had tried everything to get rid of them but still the dandelions grew in her beautiful lawn. She had tried pulling them out. But they simply grew back. She had tried salt, but this did nothing. She had tried every spray known to woman, but they simply grew back. She had even tried a steam machine from Mitre 10 Mega but you guessed it, they popped up anyway. What to do? So, she wrote to the leading professor of grasses at Lincoln University. She explained all that she had done and how if it wasn't for the dandelions, she could have won garden of the street for 2023. The learned professor wrote back, "I suggest you learn to live with them." I suggest you learn to live with them.

Today's Gospel, Chapter 13, is right in the heart of Matthew's gospel and it is in the heart of a section where he is using parables. He uses parables to explain what God's kingdom is like. You might remember from last week, that a parable in the hands of Jesus is a story that, instead of us interpreting it, begins to interpret us. Jesus tells the story of a sower who sowed excellent wheat seed into a paddock. To his enormous disappointment along with the good wheat heads, tares appear. Tares are bad wheat, no good for human consumption. To really open up this parable we need to know that tares and wheat look exactly the same, and it's only at harvest that you can tell the difference.

There is good news and a challenge for us here.

The good news first. It is not our place to judge. We are not to go along the rows pulling out the tares, this will damage the good crop, and, we might get the wrong ones. Jesus is very much of the same school as the professor, we just have to learn to live with them. God will judge later.

To be sure there have been and there are many Christian communities which have narrowly defined who is in and who is out. The Essenes, the Dead Sea community of Jesus day, were like that, and the Pharisees too. That is not Jesus' way.

Secondly, if we expect the Christian community to be perfect, we will be constantly disappointed. St Augustine said the church is a school for sinners not a museum for saints. Another way of saying this is that, if you find the perfect church, you have just ruined it by joining.

The last bit of good news is that evil will not thrive forever. The world is not as we would like it to be. There are terrible things done **but** there will come a time when God will make amends. This is God's work, so we don't need to despair. Evil will not have its way forever.

Henry Nouwen puts it well:

*“We often confuse unconditional love with unconditional approval. God loves us without conditions but does not approve of every human behavior. God doesn’t approve of betrayal, violence, hatred, suspicion, and all other expressions of evil, because they all contradict the love God wants to instill in the human heart. Evil is the absence of God’s love. Evil does not belong to God.*

*God’s unconditional love means that God continues to love us even when we say or think evil things. God continues to wait for us as a loving parent waits for the return of a lost child. It is important for us to hold on to the truth that God never gives up loving us even when God is saddened by what we do. That truth will help us to return to God’s ever-present love.”*

Henri Nouwen

OK, so what are we to do in the meantime? In a word, Grow. Our job is to grow in the fruits of the Spirit. You will remember the fruits of the Spirit, as outlined for us in Galatians, are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And as we show forth the good fruits of God’s love in our lives, then God’s kingdom will flourish. But how do we do this and what difference does it make anyway?

Two weeks ago, we gathered, not separately as the eight congregations, but together. On one level this was just a bunch of people getting together. As much as we could, we had both Mandarin and English, we had songs that we all knew, and we listened to our bishop. We shared together in the bread and wine of our Lord, and then we ate together and watched funny plays together. No big deal really, but is it? Really it is. In so many ways our world is determined to divide us. The current rhetoric is that a war with China is almost inevitable, that we must follow Australia and join a new cold war. The first task in preparing for war is to change the other side into something less than human, to demonize them. To get suspicious of them. And yet here we are a bunch of Christians with our faith in common, coming together. We are a testimony that it doesn't have to be that way. There is more that brings us together than divides us. It might seem a small thing but in our world, we are a living witness that diverse people can get along and in Jesus Christ we are brothers and sisters before anything else.

As it turns out we have learned so much from this parable of Jesus.

The tares and the wheat grow together. We need to learn to live with that.

We need to build a culture of patience and grace. Evil will have its time of judgment but it's not our job to do the judging. Our job is to grow more and more in the way of Jesus. And in doing this we become an example to the world of a better way. One built on the law of love.

The question I want to leave us with - how might I grow in the way of love this week?