

A Play and Reflection

Introduction:

Last week we came to a point in Matthew where we have a series of parables talking about the Kingdom of Heaven and we will be hearing all of them. Today's reading is the second parable in the series, and it is the other parable where the author decides to include an interpretation.

Matthew was writing to a community of Jewish Christians. It is why one of the features of his Gospel is that where Mark and Luke refer to the Kingdom of God, Matthew only ever refers to the Kingdom of Heaven. His community are struggling with the idea of what their faith means, because the temple is no longer standing and they are no longer welcome into the synagogues.

And so, we hear the parable of the wheat and the weeds from Matthew 13:24-30 adapted and dramatised from The Message.

Narrator:

Jesus told them another story. A farmer sets his slaves to plant seed in his field.

Slave 2:

Jesus' audience would have known that a competent farmer would have spent plenty of time preparing the field. No one wants to plant their crop and get some random weed. Sowing seed is an investment for the future.

Narrator:

That night, while the slaves were sleeping, his enemy sowed thistles all through the wheat and slipped away before dawn. When the first green shoots appeared and the grain began to form, the thistles showed up too.

Slave 1: [As if trying to keep a straight face]

Master, that was clean seed you planted, wasn't it? Where did these thistles come from?

Slave 2: [Laughs, and says to slave 1].

There aren't many ways we slaves can get back at those who think they own us. Great "innocent" question to ask! He must be an incompetent farmer!

Master:

An enemy did this.

Slave 2: [Still laughing, and says to slave 1]

What a ridiculous scenario. Why would someone take the time and preparation to be able to sow thistle seeds?

Slave 1: [Also laughing to slave 2]

Absolutely! What an incompetent farmer. First he buys bad seed and then he blames it on some unknown enemy! [Both laugh]

Slave 2: [to slave 1]

Hey, watch this!

[To master, with an innocent tone of voice]

Should we weed out the thistles?

Master:

No, if you weed the thistles, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time. Then I'll instruct the harvesters to pull up the thistles and tie them in bundles for the fire, then gather the wheat and put it in the barn.

Slave 1: [to slave 2]

Too bad, he accidentally started with the right response. I suppose anyone would think that pulling up the weeds would disrupt the wheat. [Laughs] Still, he doesn't know about not trampling over the young plants. Obviously he doesn't know much about farming...

Slave 2: [to slave 1]

But did you hear what else he said – ha! – he's going to pull up the weeds first and then harvest the wheat. That's a classic way of losing half your crop by knocking the heads off the grain.

Slave 1: [to slave 2]

Great plan. That will leave even more for those who rely on gleaning to get food for the next year. We won't tell him that, will we?

[Matthew 13:36-43](#)

From the Message

Jesus dismissed the congregation and went into the house. His disciples came in and said, "Explain to us that story of the thistles in the field."

So he explained. "The farmer who sows the pure seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the pure seeds are subjects of the kingdom, the thistles are subjects of the Devil, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, the curtain of history. The harvest hands are angels.

"The picture of thistles pulled up and burned is a scene from the final act. The Son of Man will send his angels, weed out the thistles from his kingdom, pitch them in the trash, and be done with them. They are going to complain to high heaven, but nobody is going to listen. At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of their Father.

"Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

Reflection

Once again, our reading of this parable has been coloured by one ancient interpretation, which may or may not date back to Jesus. Once again, by exploring other interpretations, we get a different picture.

It might challenge our sensibilities more than a bit to imagine God as a somewhat incompetent farmer! The one thing this farmer gets right is not pulling up the weeds when they are seedlings, but even that is given the wrong reasoning. Of course, all metaphors have their shortcoming, but it does need naming. It could be as simple as being a humorous device to keep people listening, though it could also be an important point in the original telling of the story.

Many commentators talk about this story being a story about not being too quick to judge others. This is not to say that Matthew is against church discipline – there are other passages that show discipline is important. The Royal Commission into institutional child abuse has shone a light on what happens when there are failures of church discipline, so to engage well in our contemporary society, this is something we need.

For the first time in Matthew's story, Jesus meets with a mixed crowd and does not make separations. All are taught, all are fed, all are healed ... and coming up we hear of the Canaanite woman's faith.

This is not a story about us and them or insiders and outsiders; it is a story about all of us. If we try to create separate categories of people according to how acceptable they are, then the wheat is damaged along with the weeds.

Later in the service we will be commissioning the new Elders and Church Councillors. In our commissioning service, the Church Councillors are reminded their function as a council is to:

give priority in its life to building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the Congregation to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

The ministry of Elder has a similar function with a more pastoral focus. This parable reminds us we are called to aid growth and not to damage it.

This is also the call of every member of the body of Christ within our daily life. The barriers between "us" and "them" are not ours to determine, but we are called to help all experience the love of God as we have experienced that love. So as we reflect on this parable, I wonder who are the people that you find hard to accept? What might it mean for you to leave them in God's hands?