

SERMON

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May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“And the slaves of the householder came and said to him ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then did these weeds come from?’

Our gospel text today, the parable of the plants and the weeds, is used by Jesus as a way of illustrating what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus is trying to convey, not a physical, or geographical kingdom, but a phenomenon that has not been seen or experienced by human beings before now. Here he presents to us a kingdom where apparent paradox is a reality and where, amid unexpected outcomes and seeming contradiction, not only is there hope, but also a call to faithfulness.

The story begins with a master who sows seed in his field. One of the first principles I was taught when I began gardening was that above all else, the quality and condition of the soil must be right to ensure success. Careful planning and consideration must take place because seed is too precious and valuable to be sown anywhere. So, we assume that the master has taken all necessary steps to mitigate for every eventuality to ensure a good harvest. All is well. Time passes and finally, in their season and in their time, the plants come up.

The servants, expecting one thing, a field filled with healthy and bountiful plants, find weeds growing alongside the plants. This is not what they were expecting. “Did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then did these weeds come from?”, they ask. It is a question loaded with confusion, acute anxiety and maybe even panic. How do they make sense of the unexpected outcome they are witnessing? In addition, how are they to respond to this new reality before them?

“These are strange and uncertain times” is a phrase that I and countless others have heard repeatedly this year. We are passing through a time that has already left our world and our lives unrecognisable. I have found myself asking questions of a similar texture to that expressed by the servants in this passage, what exactly are we looking at? How can we make sense of it? We who are being trained for ministry and those who have been sent out, commissioned and now licensed, have entered a world where there are more unknowns than ever before. This is not the field we expected. Like the servants in the parable, we are looking yet we do not comprehend what we are looking at.

To date, we have lost approximately 500,000 souls and counting, to Covid-19 worldwide. This is also the year where we were unable to avert our gaze from an act of murder. We watched, helplessly, as a precious life created by God was extinguished from the face of this earth. For a lot of us, the aftermath of witnessing such an act of violence and the continued and mounting cost of the loss we are withstanding has left an indelible mark on our weary souls. This is the reality. To say otherwise would be false and at best, delusional. So, how are we to respond in the face of tragedy and pain?

I believe that the parable holds within it, an invitation from God, for hope. For in this kingdom, there is a mixture of present reality and a future hope.

But this a hope that is hard because contradictions, flaws and even mystery, are all uncomfortable and unwelcomed in our world today. Society demands certainty and loose ends are not tolerated. Yet, for me, the Christian faith is filled with mystery, questions, wondering, unclarity as well as hope and truth. This is a living faith that resists society's demands for comfort and control. It is a faith that makes space for and holds uncomfortable tensions.

On the one hand, it is a faith that acknowledges and recognises the pain and the devastation that is left in the wake of evil and calamity. On the other hand, it stands in a face of opposition and suffering and refuses for that to be the final word. And as it looks and moves forward, in quiet confidence, it declares trust in a God who has proven to be steadfast. It is not either or, it is both and. Neither position is compromised or diminished. Both are held and both are true.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the strength given to us by the Holy Spirit, gives us, the people of God this hope. We are redeemed and called by name. We are called and sent out to be faithful. With all the surprises, disappointments and contradictions, we remain called and licensed to be faithful and fruitful through it all.

Like the servants in the parable, all of us, without exception, at one time or another, have had our hearts fail us. Yet, we are not forsaken nor are we alone. The psalmist says, our help comes from the Lord, who made Heaven and Earth. This is the One we serve. This is the author and finisher of our faith.

First Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 23 to 25 says this, and this is my prayer for all of us:

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.