

Isaiah 44.6-8./ Romans 8, 12-25.

St Matthew Ch. 13 vs: 24-30/36-43

St James Sunday, 19/07/26.

Recently, I've been listening to a programme about Katherine Parr the last wife of Henry 8th. It wasn't so much about the kind of person she was that impressed me which was astute, intelligent and capable but what struck me was when the person who had written a book about her said that the main objective in those days, let's say apart from staying alive, was to go to heaven. How many of us would have been brought up with that kind of teaching. We had to be good and we'd go to heaven. But how often would unenlightened people threaten others with a promise of hell instead of heaven.

The church struggles, today, with the desire and the need to be inclusive; in other words, not to reject anyone because for one reason or another they don't fit in. Chapter 13 of St. Matthew's Gospel, which is often

spoken of as the chapter of parables, has something to say about inclusivity.

This parable of the good seed and the bad or as it used to be known the tares and the wheat tells us something about how God puts up with us all, at least until our true nature is revealed. The parable isn't about running a farm or even an allotment because, I know from what my Son keeps telling me, that when weeds come up there's only one thing to do and that is to get rid of them. But here the parable isn't really about farming but about God's attitude to his people and their place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The expression the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel means the same as the Kingdom of God in St. Mark's Gospel. And it means: 'how God works' here and now. And the way God works is not the way we do. I recall an Old Testament verse in the writings of the prophet Isaiah: 'My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are my ways your ways, says the Lord.' (Chapter 55).

Sensible farmers weed out the weeds. Our farmer doesn't. What he does is an example of what St. Paul will later call 'God's foolishness'. The way God works is not to weed out anyone. This farmer says: 'Let them grow together.' All very inclusive- for the time being.

Down through the centuries, though, the church has sought in many and diverse ways to clear out those it believed to be the weeds in order to maintain the purity of the rest and so we had the various Inquisitions.

First of all, in Northern Italy and Southern France around 1232 when those who were thought to belong to a heretical group were seen as enemies of society and could be tortured and handed over for burning at the stake. Then there was the Spanish Inquisition in 1478 directed against converts from Judaism and Islam and later against Protestants. In 1542 the Papal Inquisition was re-instituted to combat Protestantism and it was the early 19th century before that all came to an end. It can't be denied that today

many suffer for their faith, you can read a lot about that in the Church Times and it all seems a long way from those words of Jesus: 'Let them grow together.' Inclusivity again. Give them a chance; let's be patient, let's wait and see. As we heard earlier from St Paul's letter to the Romans, we are children of God and we have an obligation to defend ourselves against wrongdoing and not live as our human nature wants us to and bow to each temptation. In the reading from Isaiah also, there's encouragement; Do not fear, or be afraid but trust in the one true God.

So, there's another way we could understand the parable of the good seed and the bad. If we imagine the good seed to be those who listen and act on God's word and keep his commandments (and that's not easy at times) we might, without being too judgemental, consider that the weeds are those whose lives take no thought for any of those commandments; people who daily engage in ways of

wickedness. The papers and television are full of the shocking things that go on...human trafficking for one, and many more. And yet, good and bad, we all live together on this planet. We're all in the conflict that accompanies survival. We all have to grow together; we all have to bear with one another. It's the Cosmic Struggle!

We know that weeds can never become wheat or barley and yet in his parables Jesus is always pointing us to a better future. It may be that this parable is about the extreme patience of God, the patience that is born of love; waiting for things to change in people's lives, giving a chance for repentance and a turning around, allowing time as one of the church's occasional services says: for amendment of life.

So, there's a lot that can be gleaned from Matthew's chapter of parables.

Amen