

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost 17th July 2005
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Readings:

- Genesis 28: 10-19a
- Psalm 139: 1-11, 23-24 page 370
- Romans 8: 12-25
- Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Probably a good deal of the shock of the bombing in London was that the suspected bombers lived such ordinary lives in the midst of other everyday people! The source of great anxiety is that they looked and acted like normal every day people — so much so that there was no suspicion!

Now of course people with the slightest problem with anxiety will be looking twice at every body and those who were never anxious will of course become very wary.

For a time however, the bombers were lost in the crowd.
They blended in!

The same can be said for the Oklahoma bombers in 1995 (Tim McVeigh and Terry Nicholls and others too!)

We live our daily lives brushing up against people in shops, on transport, in sports teams, in lifts, who could be fine citizens or who could be guilty of all sorts of crimes. I recall a man who was a friend and very close to me at theological college who is now serving a considerable term for his crimes against children. We spent a lot of time together and no one suspected!

In the gospel story today, Jesus tells a story of wheat and weeds growing together — the good and the bad mingled!

This is the second of seven parables of the kingdom told by Jesus from the boat at the edge of the Sea of Galilee.

Parables are "earthly stories with a heavenly meaning!"

Each of the parables uses a situation in everyday life to convey a spiritual meaning — an aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven. Last week the parable of the sower and the seeds (and the soils!) indicated the need for a receptive attitude to receive and enter into the Kingdom.

This week's parable about the wheat and the Tares or Weeds tells how Good and Bad exist together in the Kingdom until God sorts things out at the end.

The other parables are: Mustard Seed, Yeast in the Dough, Hidden Treasure, Pearl of Great Price, and the Fish in the Net.

We are probably wondering why it was not possible to separate the wheat and the weeds when we all know how to extract weeds from our garden!

The difficulty was that the tares were a weed called "bearded darnel". In the early stages of growth, these weeds so closely resembled wheat stalks that it was impossible to distinguish one from another. To remove the weed risked removing wheat!

Then by the time both wheat and weeds had formed heads, the roots of the darnel were so intertwined with the wheat that they could *not* be pulled out without removing the wheat as well. **BOTH** must therefore be left to grow together until the harvest!

Evidently, the Jews referred to darnel as "bastard wheat" and it was believed it had been passed down from the evil time before Noah.

So the weeds and the wheat had to be left to be separated at the harvest. But not as it was harvested — instead, after the grains were threshed, the darnel seeds could be picked out by hand. The grain was spread out and it was possible for women to remove the seeds from the wheat. The darnel seeds are similar in shape and size to grains of wheat but can be detected because they are slate grey in colour.

It was important to remove the darnel seeds because the grain of the bearded darnel was slightly poisonous causing dizziness and sickness — it was also narcotic in its effect as well as being unpleasant to the taste. Plainly, it was BAD for you!

So then, almost until the very last moment, it is difficult to separate wheat from weeds!

Now the idea that a person might deliberately sow weeds among someone else's crop is not imaginary — it did occasionally happen! Roman law had codified this as a crime and laid down a punishment.

So the images as distant as they seem from us, were very real to the people of Galilee hearing Jesus' parable.

1. It points out how the hostile forces in the world are mixed in with and intertwined with all the others and that both good and bad influences affect our lives and that we must always be aware and on guard as we live in their midst.
2. It teaches us not to be so quick with our judgements — if the reapers in the story had their way, half of the crop would have been lost in their haste to sort things out!
Patience, Careful Judgement, Wisdom, Prayer need all to be involved in the judgements we make!
[note] Fruits of the Spirit — Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, ... Gentleness, Self Control... etc.
all seem to be wanting to slow us down in a world which seems to want everything done at a frantic pace with answers *NOW!*
If we can proceed at speed **AND** be right! Well and Good!
But hasty responses can often be **WRONG!** The old knee jerk reaction thing! The warning is not to be too hasty and risk damaging or destroying the Good as we deal with the Bad!
3. It teaches that judgement comes at the very last moment just before the wheat goes to be made into flour are the bad seeds plucked out! Judgement is NOT HASTY but it does come when

God's justice will be all in all.
Paul reflects on this in Romans 8:21-25

FINALLY

It teaches that it is God alone who judges justly and that as much as we might work to put things right — in the end it is God's work!

The Old Testament reading about Jacob reminds us that when we least expect it and in the most unlikely places, God can speak to us to turn our lives around. The God of his father and grandfather has [...] him... there is awe and worship....

Jacob the one who swindled his brother's birthright is called by God to live up to the responsibility he has stolen [the birthright of elder brother; i.e. the responsibilities that come with the birthright! LA] to be responsible to God and therefore care for his family... Jacob chooses the good influence!

The Psalm is one of those worth pondering day by day as we live with the good and the bad around us....

There are so many issues which arise when terror strikes. I wonder if it is helpful to have so much information reported relating to the London bombers — there are those who will want to destroy what they see as our weeds and in so doing, will damage much of the crop of wheat. (already there have been revenge attacks! which is deplorable.)

Also, is it helpful to report on four "Muslim terrorists"? — Would they be referred to as "Christian terrorists" if they were members of the Church of England?

Are inter-faith prayer services useful? — I think they are because they build relationships and friendships among the clergy and officials of religious groups and send a message to others of the possibility of cooperation.

Atheists who stand back and accuse people of faith, are NOT the ones trying to develop dialogue and are not able to do so among people of faith.

We live in an often confusing world! The Church is charged with following the mission of Christ which will always be one attempt at re-interpretation of Christ in a new era and environment.

Our story today is a parable about life with God and the fact that we rub shoulders with the Good and the Bad alike. We need to make wise and careful judgements for ourselves but avoid being hasty about judging others. Remember too that ultimately God will sort us out!