

# A farmer sowed good seed ...

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 23 July 2023

A Reflection by Rev Hee Won Chang

Pentecost 8A

Genesis 28: 10-19a; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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*Please pray with me.*

*Your Word, O God has been proclaimed; Holy Spirit tend to the seeds of Good News scattered today. Amen.*

“The kingdom of heaven is like this” is the way the parables begin.

For the first listeners, parables were more than stories, for they heard it alongside the rich stories and poems of the Hebrew Scriptures, sung and read and discussed daily around the fields and synagogues. They heard it under their current reality of living under the Roman occupation, wondering when God will deliver them from oppression, like the times of the Exodus where God freed their ancestors from slavery.

We too hear these parables alongside many stories of our world - from the cries of the Pacifica communities and the threat they face with the releasing of nuclear waste waters from Japan, extreme weather conditions taking lives after lives; and the sighs of the many impacted by the rise of living costs to the stories of divided opinions on the Voice to Parliament, and the stories from our churches of broken relationships and difference that leads to discrimination.

Parables are set alongside these complicated stories of our messy world, inviting us to hear the shocking and revolutionary message about God’s kingdom. If anything, parables are expressions of Jesus’ shocking announcement that God’s kingdom is here. That it is arriving on earth as in heaven.

Jesus’ parables are reworking and reclaiming Israel’s prophetic traditions, announcing God’s judgement and renewal. And please bear in mind that God’s judgement is not about punishment, but always about liberation and renewing relationships, unsettling the status quo and bringing a stream of justice wrapped in goodness and mercy. God’s judgement is not about destruction but about restoration and hope.

Jesus uses parables to conceal and reveal these Kingdom messages, to confront and comfort the listeners. At the same time, it was an invitation and a challenge to the listeners, to the hearers to engage with the story, to wonder and question about their current reality.

So, with wondering and questions we enter today’s parable before us.

There was a farmer who sowed good seed in a field. The farmer had workers but he or she does the work of sowing the seeds. The seeds were good. Like the creation that was good in the eye of the Creator. Like each one of us created in the divine image - proclaimed good, very good and blessed by God.

And the story unfolds, that later in the night, in this field of good seeds, weeds are planted. And they start to grow alongside the wheat, and here the weed is referred to as darnel or tare that looked very much like wheat and was plentiful in Israel. But the workers could distinguish between the two, and they ask the farmer the quality of the seeds - did you not sow good seeds?

From our world where good and evil coexist; where some prepare for war and some cry out for peace, where some lash out abuse to the LGBTIQA+ community and some create safe and affirming spaces, where some keep their silence and some cry out for change, we too raise this question and whisper to God, did you not sow good seeds?

Why do bad things happen to the good people? Why do the First Peoples have to continually fight for their rightful voice and existence in their lands now called Australia? Where does evil come from? Can we not just go and pluck out the evil ourselves?

And to our wondering and frustration, God whispers back, *no!*

No, so that the goodness can be protected.

No, so that goodness may flourish and have abundant life.

In the field, the presence of weeds does not destroy the wheat. Like the presence of evil that cannot destroy the goodness of God's coming kingdom here and now.

God knows where the evil comes from and we can know/tell apart what is good and what is bad, yet the weeding is not up to us to decide. Instead, God assures us to let the wheat and weed grow together until the time of harvest.

The weed is not pulled out, but left to grow alongside the wheat. Perhaps it's the reflection of the complexities of our lives often tangled up in good and bad. Tangled up in various layers of structures and systems of privilege and injustice. Complete overall might not be up to us but up to God's transforming, loving grace that will free us from all oppression.

As we wait for that day, for the mighty streams of justice to roll down, the roots of wheat and weed are intertwined but the presence of the weeds should not be the cause for inaction and silence.

Instead, God calls the workers to continue till and take care of the field. In the field, both the wheat and weed are watered and tended. In this world of good and evil, the sun rises on both the bad and good alike; like God's rain that falls on the just and the unjust.

In the presence of evil, communities can still bear witness to the presence of the kingdom of God here and now. In the presence of our enemy a table is prepared - this table, not of ours but of Christ, a place that has space for the saint and the sinner. Here, all we can do is share our space and invite people into the amazing/ radical love of Jesus Christ poured out to this world unconditionally and in abundance.

Like the workers in the field, we are asked to till spaces that embody this abundant love, till spaces that are rooted in justice and truth telling, till spaces of forgiveness and reconciliation, till spaces for the weeds to be named and the wheats to flourish.

So, as we are held by God in Jesus Christ, we rise with love over hate. We have the strength to respond with non-violence over violence. Only through God can we rise with goodness over evil. Only through God, evil will not consume us.

Then comes the difficult passage ... that when the time comes, when Christ comes again, at the time of harvest ... the wheat is bundled and stored in the barn while the weeds are collected then burned. This is accentuated further in the later passages where "*the Chosen One will send the angels who will weed out the kingdom of everything that causes sin.*"

The things that make us stumble: greed and arrogance, self-righteousness and lack of empathy - that leads to empire building, colonization, plundering of earth. All that divides us, all that puts us against each other; all that stops us from loving the neighbour as ourselves. All that stops us from loving ourselves as God loves us, all that stops us from honouring the creation - is going to be weeded out. Hallelujah!

And "*the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" Sounds harsh and scary but maybe it takes a fiery furnace to extinguish evil. Maybe it takes a fiery furnace to burn down structural injustices that harm and hurt. Maybe it takes a fiery furnace to dismantle systemic evils like racism, sexism and prejudices of all kinds that entangle the roots of every human institution.

Maybe that is the Good News? Maybe that's the push here, that we should not be afraid to name evil as evil and confront it, not ignore it. Not be silenced by it. But to tend to it with goodness and love. Tend to it with mercy and grace. A very tough call.

Till that time comes, as we fiercely oppose evil, God in our midst will unmask and unveil the power structures, exposing the weeds in the systems that run our world and even our church. Then nothing should stop us, we should not be afraid to walk into the fiery furnace together, for there is healing and hope at the end.

Burned. And dust shall remain.

Burned. And ashes shall remain.

Burnt to dust and ashes and new life will emerge.

Promise of God's hope and renewal not just for the wheat but for the weed as well.

Amen.

#### Resources:

- Study Notes on How to read the Parable of Jesus from Bible Project, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/how-to-read-the-bible-the-parables-of-jesus/>
- N.T Wright, Simply Jesus: A new vision of what he did and who he was and why he matters. New York: Harper One, 2011
- R.J Allen et al, Preaching God's Transforming Justice: a lectionary commentary, Year A, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013
- W. Brueggemann, Texts for Preaching: A lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV-Year A. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995