

## *In The Midst of Messiness*

(Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, Preached by Cheryl Williams on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at Footscray Baptist Church)

For 8 years I did voluntary work with some seriously bad seeds. They had spent or were still in Juvenile Justice serving sentences for some pretty bad crimes – manslaughter, rape, robbery, culpable driving, drug offences. One thing I did notice about those young men, was the way they were different on the outside, when they were socialising with non-offenders. I found some of them to be very caring, keen to improve their cooking skills, happy to do other household chores, but a little bit timid when taken out to do normal things like see a movie, have a meal out, sight-seeing etc. I think, on the outside they found other role models, on the inside, their role models were simply more violent and serious offenders.

In our parable this week we have two sowers and two kinds of seed. The good sower sowing wheat, the bad sowing weeds. This parable is only found in Matthew. Like last week (although a bit unusual) Jesus offers his disciples an explanation.

So, to the parable, a man (Jesus) sows some good seed. Then, in the night someone sabotages that sowing by sowing weeds in the same soil. The wheat grows, but so do the weeds. The slaves ask the good sower a number of questions. First, didn't you plant good seed, what has happened? The sower offers an explanation about another growing weeds amongst the good seed. Then the slaves ask about pulling out the weeds, but the sower says no, not yet.

Jesus offers a way of understanding the parable. Many commentators suggest this ending to the story was added much later. However, let's see what it says. The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man (Jesus), the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, the weeds are the children of the evil one, the enemy is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers angels. At the end of the age, the weeds will be gathered and burnt, and, the wheat but into the barn.

Often this parable has been understood in terms of judgement, judgement where the good seed takes the role of the reapers (angels) and passes judgement on others – with awful consequences. To do such is to misread the parable.

I invite you to look with me again at this parable, and like last week, look carefully at what the sower does.

The sower goes and sows good seed.

When the weeds are noticed, he tells the slaves **not** to pull them out yet. They need to have some patience.

Maybe it is not easy to tell the difference between the wheat and weeds until they are more mature. The roots of both would have been entangled, so to remove the weeds would mean that the root system and growth of the wheat would be damaged, better to let them grow together. Things will be dealt with later, later, but not by the wheat or the slaves, the reapers will deal with this, will separate what needs to be separated.

So, the wheat and the weeds must live together, the good seed and the bad seed must share the space for the time being. This is a statement about reality is it no! We all

must live with the good and bad, both within ourselves and beyond our selves. We must live in the midst of the messy entangled life. Right now, we know a thing or two about life in the midst of messiness!

What does this understanding of the parable offer us?

I think this leads to a very different understanding of this parable than we have had before.

It reminds us that we live with good and bad, that they are both entangled. That good and bad co-exist in this world. What effects one effects the other – the bad can influence the good but more importantly the good can influence the bad.

The sower tells the slaves to be patient and to not weed out the bad seed lest it damage the good seed.

(I am really intrigued as to why the slaves are told to leave the weeds alone – maybe it is that it is too hard to actually tell the difference between the two until you see what kind of fruit they bear. What is a weed anyway, if not just another plant in the wrong place!)

It reminds us about who does the judging of others – it is not us! Jesus says it will be done at the end of time by the reapers (angels).

It also makes no bones that there will be judgement, just not our kind of judgement. It will be the kind of judgement God has, a merciful kind of judgement, I suspect. We don't know who is in and who is out in God's scheme. Better to save our energy to live out the kingdom of heaven – to offer care and compassion to others, to stand up for justice, to proclaim the kingdom of peace.

It seems to me that the wheat just needs to concentrate on being wheat, on growing and maturing and bearing fruit, without looking over and seeing what the weeds are up to.

So, in conclusion may I offer some final thoughts about this parable.

1. For the life of God to be real it needs to live and grow in the real world.<sup>1</sup>
2. Nit-picking in a field of wheat can be damaging, nit-picking in the midst of the church can also be damaging.<sup>2</sup>
3. We need to leave the judging to God.
4. We shouldn't be in the business of blaming others – we are all in this together, as our leaders are saying at the moment.
5. This parable warns us against holding onto our prejudices.
6. Strict boundaries have no place in the field of God.
7. We have no business writing others off, as, we don't know what is going on underground.
8. We shouldn't uproot people in our minds or attitudes by treating them as no longer of any worth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From 'Jesus condones weed – Ordinary 16A'

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Bill Loader – First Thoughts on Year A Gospel Passage from the Lectionary – Pentecost 7, July 19, 2020.

As Martin Luther King Jr said – We must learn to live together as brothers (sic) or perish together as fools.<sup>4</sup>

Go out into the world, living in its messiness - in the knowledge that God gives us all that we need to grow and mature when we look to him rather than at those around us.

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in 'At the edge of the enclosure'