

The Sixth Sunday After Trinity

The Collect: Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament Isaiah 44.6–8: Thus says the Lord the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

Gospel Matthew 13.24–30, 36–43: Jesus said: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.²⁷ 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?”²⁸ He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?”²⁹ But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” Then he left the crowds and went into the house.

And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’³⁷ He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers,⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Reflection

The great breakthrough in major world faiths, part of the Great Transformation, which is the title of a book by Karen Armstrong, was the recognition of God as God and not as one of many gods. The old understanding had led to division, to people needing to put something over others, to the setting up of barriers between people and meant within religions and between them and other world views came the need to always be in rivalry.

Then around the year 600BC comes this bigger sense of the mystery of God, of the transcendence of God which is different to the more anthropomorphic concepts of a God. No longer God being conceived of as in the image of men. Crucial to this within Judaism was the teaching of the prophets connecting God's way of justice and peace with the way people might live this out and care for each other. Particularly for the poor, for the stranger, for the foreigner. God understood to be on the side of the poor, of the marginalised, of the put down.

It was the vision captured by Isaiah, as the people returned from Babylonian exile, and centuries later brought to life and reality by Jesus. Living out himself this way and teaching about it. Traveling lightly through life, being generous in making judgements and being welcoming to friend and stranger.

Living this way might mean throwing something away or putting something aside. Moving on. The picture in the parable today is of wheat and weeds growing alongside each other, but ultimately separated when the harvest comes so that what has grown to bring life can now take centre stage. Ready to be what its growth had been intended for, had prepared it for.

As people we might then consider the putting aside of what for us is not needed, what might pull us down, what gets in the way of how we might be. In doing this recognising that we no longer are bearing grudges or holding on to disappointments. No longer needing to bring up something hurtful out of malice or letting our anger at something else bring hurt to others. Instead what is growing that brings forth life can also bring hope so that we and others can flourish.

At the same time this does not mean to simply pretend that all is well when the consequences of past mistakes, poor judgements, selfish actions are still being lived with even if these are unspoken things. People do also need the space to articulate a hurt, a wound, a betrayal, a lie and to have confidence that justice can be obtained.

This is why, at the present time, we can and should keep firmly in mind the personal impact of Covid 19, especially for those whose lives it has devastated. We need an honest acceptance that things are not and will not be the same. That as a new normal emerges there is a transforming role for faith communities if this normal could be a more open, equitable, compassionate and generous way of living.

Isaiah offered those returning from exile a better way of understanding God and how this understanding could transform the priorities, the motivation and activity of the people, specifically for those identifying as the people of God.

Jesus' words quoted by Matthew, but with images much less quoted by the other gospel writers, include occasions when Jesus' teaching used the rabbinic style of exaggeration to make an important point. In the case of today's passage to emphasise the need a way of living that enables all people to flourish as being like a good harvest. Putting aside living selfishly in ways that bring resentment and division, that bring further division, suffering and death.

Instead living a way that can build people up, draw people together and open hearts and minds to show God's love for all.