

## The Good and Bad In us, Around us and Beyond us

Psalm 23 and Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

The other evening while watching an episode of NCIS on television, one of the special agents made a statement something along these lines: "Remember life is not black-and-white – it is not clear cut. No one here is all good or all bad. There is some of each in all of us."

And as I thought about this in relation to the lectionary passage for today it struck me that there is good and bad **in** us, **around** us, and **beyond** us.

There is good and bad In us, Around us, and Beyond us.

The lectionary passage is taken from Matthew, chapter 13 verses 24-30 and 36-43<sup>1</sup>. The heading to this passage in my Bible is The Parable of the Weeds. Let us look at that passage.

There are some 23 parables in the gospel of Matthew, and 7 of them are found in Matthew 13. In Matthew 13 we see that the disciples, after listening to the parable of the farmer who went out to sow his seed, asked Jesus, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

Jesus replied that not all who hear will understand. Not all have had the exposure you have had. Some whose hearts are ready will understand. He tells the disciples that he tells stories, parables, to create readiness to nudge the people toward receptive insight<sup>2</sup>.

Let us look at the Parable of the Weeds.

When Jesus started his ministry, he started by calling on those listening to him to "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near"<sup>3</sup>.

You will see that six of the parables in Matthew 13 start with Jesus saying "The kingdom of heaven is like...". He is explaining by means of parables what the Kingdom is like. The Kingdom already here and to come.

And he tells those listening that the Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But then, while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away.

When the wheat began to sprout the servants of the owner came to him having seen the weeds and asked whether he did not use good seed. They asked him where did the weeds come from.

And he replied, "An enemy did this."

And then, they asked the owner whether they should pull up these weeds. And the owner says "No, because while you are pulling up the weeds, you will uproot the wheat as well." And he tells them to let them both grow together until the harvest. At the time of the harvest, he will give instructions to the

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<sup>1</sup> The New Matthew Henry Commentary, page 1465 provides this summary - "Now the general sense of the parable is to describe to us the present and future state of the kingdom of heaven, the Gospel church: Christ's care of it, the devil's enmity toward it, the mixture it contains of both good and bad in this world, and the separation between them in the other world."

<sup>2</sup> This paraphrasing comes from Eugene Peterson's The Message. [Matthew 13:10-17](#)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 4:17. John the Baptist started with the same words – Matthew 3:2.

harvesters to first gather the weeds, tie them in bundles to be burnt and to gather the wheat and to place it in his barn.

Those listening would have understood what he was talking about. The weeds were probably darnel or tare, a weed that looks and behaves very much like wheat.<sup>4</sup> the listeners would have understood that an enemy of the farmer, wanting to do harm to the farmer, could do so by sowing darnel in the farmer's field of wheat.

We read then that Jesus told two further parables before he, and the disciples left the crowd. The disciples then came to him and asked him to explain the parable of the weeds in the field and he explained the parable as follows.

He says that it was the Son of Man who sowed the good seed in the field, which is the world. He says that the good seed represents the sons and daughters of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons and daughters of the evil one. He says that the enemy who sows the weeds is the devil, and it will be angels at the end of the age, that will be the harvesters.

The weeds, representing everything that causes sin, and all who do evil, will be gathered up and burnt. The righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.

When explained like this I believe the disciples understood what Jesus had been saying.

I want to focus on the good seeds and the weeds, or one may say, the bad seeds. The field is the world where the people of the Kingdom live side-by-side with people of the evil one. As they grow up it is often very difficult to distinguish between the two.

"Remember life is not black-and-white – it is not clear cut. No one here is all good or all bad. There is some of each in all of us."

The question that arises is – what are we to do about this? If we are sons and daughters of the Kingdom, followers of Christ, are we to take steps to eradicate the weeds?

Do you remember the passage in Luke, which described how Jesus and the disciples were making their way to Jerusalem? Messengers were sent on ahead into a Samaritan village to get things ready for them. But the people did not welcome Jesus. We read in Luke<sup>5</sup>

"When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them.""

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<sup>4</sup> Tares, like weeds, have never been a marketable product. "Tares" are actually darnel, a seed hardly identifiable from the wheat seed, and immature wheat and darnel look alike. To try to destroy the darnel would mean destroying much of the wheat, and separating one from the other would be beyond the servants' abilities. Only when the wheat has matured can the tares be detected. From: <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/5075Darnel.htm>

<sup>5</sup>Luke 9:51-55. "51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them."

When James and John hear that the townspeople are against Jesus their reaction is to ask Jesus whether they should call for fire from heaven to destroy these people – eradicate the weeds.

And we see the answer - Jesus turns and rebukes them. Jesus is saying to James and John, it is not their function to judge and to act against those who don't align with him.

It is the same answer that he gives to the disciples in regard to the darnel growing up with the wheat. Don't uproot the weeds now, let both the wheat and the darnel grow to maturity – a time of judgment will come.

And this brought me to considering the fact that there is both good and evil in us, around us, and beyond us and that it is urgent that we be aware of this as we live our daily lives.

Only Jesus was sinless. We put ourselves completely in the wrong place if we believe that we are good, without fault and better than those around us. It is sobering, but also encouraging, to read in Romans 7 that Paul wrote:

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature<sup>6</sup>. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin, living in me that does it."

Sobering because Paul the great apostle finds himself doing things that he knows he ought not to do, or failing to do things that he ought to do.

Encouraging because if Paul, totally committed to Jesus and to spreading the word in the face of so many hardships cries out like this, then I am not alone. You are not alone.

But it is a realisation that there is good and bad in us. It is the sinful nature of fallen man, and it is the reason why Jesus came to earth and was crucified for our sins. It is why, as we stumble, that we can turn to Jesus, confess what we have done, or left undone, and receive forgiveness. And we are assured of that forgiveness.

This is a call to us to be aware of two things: the first is that we are never to be complacent, never to think that we have arrived, but to know that we are on a journey and the journey will continue. The second is to be confident in the fact that we are forgiven, the slate has been wiped clean, but we are not to overstate our position. Paul said this<sup>7</sup>:

"For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of the faith God has given you."

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 12:3

So, we need to make sure that we are not complacent on the one hand, and that we do not think too highly of ourselves, on the other hand. We need to be mindful of the fact that in us there is the ability, the tendency and sometimes the desire, to do what we know is wrong.

And let us remember as we talk of, and look at, "good" and "bad" that we are not called to be good men and good women, we are called to be new men and new women. New, in the sense that having come into a saving relationship with Jesus as our saviour, we are not the men and women that we were before that. We are justified in the sense that through Jesus we are just as if we had not sinned.

What Jesus is teaching in the Parable of the Weeds is that there is good and bad around us as well. Jesus is alerting us, that we as Christ followers must be alert to this fact.

So not only good and bad **in** us, but also good and bad **around** us. And those around us who are led by the evil one look just like us, just as the darnel weeds look just like the wheat.

What are we to make of this? I think there are three things. The first is that Jesus is alerting us to the fact of the presence of evil around us. We are not to be naive. We need to be on our guard.

The second point is that it is not our task to judge or, in the words of the parable, to eradicate these weeds. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying<sup>8</sup>,

"Do not judge or you too will be judged. For the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Remember in this parable Jesus says don't pull up the weeds in case you damage the wheat. The time of harvest will come.

The third point is that rather than judging, or acting against those who to us appear evil we are to live in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.<sup>9</sup>

Love your neighbour as yourself.<sup>10</sup>

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.<sup>11</sup>

So in regard to the evil around us:

- be aware;
- do not judge; and
- understand and reflect in your life the teachings of Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7: 1-2

<sup>9</sup> Micah 6:8

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 22:34-40

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 7:12: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets".

CS Lewis writing after the end of the Second World War wrote this<sup>12</sup>:

““Enemy-occupied territory---that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.”

Enemy-occupied territory – that is what this world is.

And if we are to be aware of the good and bad in us, and around us, we are also to be aware of the good and bad **beyond** us.

Jesus explains to the disciples: “The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.”

We must not be fooled. There is a real battle over our souls that takes place daily in our minds, in our hearts, and in our spirits<sup>13</sup>.

Paul, again, guides us in this regard:<sup>14</sup>

“12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Even as God is drawing us to himself. Peter writes that the evil one wanders around like a lion looking for someone to devour.<sup>15</sup>

We are not to ignore the spiritual realm, just as we are not to be excused by blaming everything on the evil one.

“The best way to approach spiritual warfare is to find a balance between owning our mistakes and staying aware of the temptations around us.”<sup>16</sup>

Paul says:

““Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then with ... the protection of the armour of God.”<sup>17</sup>

The aim of the evil one is to divert us from following Jesus – to separate us from God.

But empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit we will overcome each time because Jesus has overcome<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

<sup>13</sup> I draw on thoughts in this article from NewSpring Church: <https://newspring.cc/articles/how-to-win-in-a-spiritual-war>

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>15</sup> [1 Peter 5:8](#)

<sup>16</sup> The article from NewSpring Church

<sup>17</sup> [Ephesians 6:13-17](#)

<sup>18</sup> John 16:33: 33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Paul's final word on this comes from Romans 8: <sup>19</sup> "If God is for us, who can be against us? We are more than conquerors. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor Demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers... Will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There is good and bad in us, around us and beyond us.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases the meaning of this parable: "The farmer who sows the pure seeds is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the pure seeds are subjects of the kingdom, the thistles are subjects of the Devil, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, the curtain of history, the harvest hands are angels. The picture of thistles pulled up and burned is a scene from the final act. The Son of Man will send his angels, weed out the thistles from his kingdom, pitch them in the trash, and be done with them. They are going to complain to high heaven, but nobody is going to listen. At the same time, ripe, holy lives will mature and adorn the kingdom of the Father.

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<sup>19</sup> [Romans 8:31-39](#)