

GOD IS THE JUDGE

Nicky Ing - 17th July 2005

Exodus 3: 1-12; Psalm 103:1-13; Romans 8:18-25; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

The story that Jesus told, about the wheat and the weeds, follows on from last week's parable about the sower. Jesus was responding to those who believed that the Kingdom of God was only for saints....for good people....the Pharisees insisted that sinners should be ruthlessly weeded out, and excluded from the Kingdom... But the message of this parable is something that Jesus lived throughout his ministry. He reached out to all sorts of people, mixing with priests, prostitutes, crooks, scribes, politicians, children, tax-collectors. Religious separatism was something Jesus could not accept, because he made it his business to seek out and save those who were lost. The Pharisees, whose very name means 'the separated ones' criticized him for associating with the wrong crowd. But Jesus knew that all communities are a mixture of the good and the bad....and also, that it isn't always easy to tell which is which! Later on, this story of wheat and weeds, was applied to the problem of sinners in the Church...which of course is also a mixed bag of good and evil...the separation must be left to God for the time of the last judgment, and in the meantime the Church must be patient and merciful. The message of this parable still challenges the Church today, and reminds us that as Christians we have no authority to pronounce the final judgment on anyone. The last word cannot be said about anyone until death, and then it is God's part, not ours, to say it. St. Paul in the letter to the Romans which we read from a few minutes ago, recognizes that while we are here on earth we will always be in a place of struggle... "*For it is in hope we were saved!*" he tells us. '*For who hopes for what is seen? But if we wait for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience...*' Paul, like Jesus, was well aware that we can often get it terribly wrong about people. After all, Paul got the wrong idea about Jesus when he went around weeding out his followers...and even though Paul had judged Jesus wrongly, he even became an apostle...which must have surprised a lot of people who thought the last word had been said about Paul! So if the final judgment really is final, then the wonderful hope is that there will be plenty of changes before then, and hope, real hope, should never be denied anyone, least of all by followers of Jesus!

As human beings, we are all a mixture of good and bad...we just can't be divided into two groups with a line drawn between them....all the good people on one side, and bad ones on the other! In our own sphere of life we have, of course, judgments we will need to make, both about ourselves and about others...and those are for our own context...but we need to look to God for the final word, remembering that God is all good and all merciful, as well as just. It is obvious really, that here on earth, we will find ourselves affected by difficulties...our own, and those of other people. It is just part of being human! Sometimes life can be damaged by tragedy caused by another person...for instance, a drunken or reckless driver who loses control of a vehicle, causing loss of life or permanent damage to other people....or maybe it is a ruthless colleague at work who by twisting the truth, can do deliberate harm to someone else's reputation, or their

career. Or perhaps we may experience the disappointment of a broken relationship, which seems to be unable to be healed, no matter how hard we try? Or it may happen that someone breaks into our home to kill or steal, and our worldview is changed by that, our sense of security is damaged. In situations such as these we do need to judge, and of course we have a right to do so. And all our human feelings will come to the fore...because we need to express how we feel. But ultimately, it is God who is the judge, not us, and all these things and many other difficulties in life are just part of our human brokenness, only able to be healed through the power and the love of God which is offered to us through Jesus Christ.

And what can we say about national and global struggles, the continual pattern of evil which pervades our society, and our world? Evil seems to have become something which almost carries an element of glamour to it. Those who make horror films try all the time to make them even more frightening...I watched a Harry Potter film last year with my 2 grandsons in England...it wasn't even a horror film really! and I found it quite terrifying! While they seemed relatively unmoved by it! On computer games, evil characters are eaten, or knocked out, or exterminated with bright and exciting graphics. In reality, we only have to tune in to the news on TV or take a look at our daily paper to see what people do to one another for the sake of ideology...or religion, or power...or fear...or greed. Yesterday I was reading about 'Oilgate' which looks as if it is going to cause a lot of embarrassment to our Government, as if there hasn't been enough recently! There is the horror of thousands of displaced people in Zimbabwe at the moment (is there an echo of our own apartheid years when people were moved out of their homes and had nowhere to go?) and the way in which the Church leaders were snubbed this week when they went to try and offer help and wisdom in the situation there. Also this week, I read that a large group of people, mostly women and children, were attacked in the Democratic Republic of Congo....30 were killed and their houses set on fire. Tribal warfare.....then there was the 10th anniversary of the massacre in Bosnia where 8000 people had been murdered....a kind of ethnic cleansing not unlike Hitler's tactics in the 2nd World war.....or Idi Amin's rule of terror. And there has been Afghanistan, and Palestine, and the Iraq story goes on and on, and then there was more terror last week... bombs and tragic loss of life in London, and people feeling shocked and frightened and apprehensive just like they did after September 11th 2002. Interesting too, wasn't it, how those people who had known the young men who seem to have carried the bombs, were so surprised because they could see so much good in them...and found it hard to believe they could possibly carry out a crime on such a scale...The truth is that evil, or perhaps we can call it hardness of the human heart.... is all around us, eating away gradually at individuals and communities. It is often very difficult to recognize it. Just as the weeds grow in the wheat and that particular type of poisonous weed, darnel, which Jesus is talking about is very similar to wheat when it is at an early stage of growth, so it is also hard to distinguish the evil which grows in the human heart. Like the weeds in the wheat field, evil grows quietly but quickly, until it chokes and weakens everything growing near to it. It seems particularly difficult to recognize it in ourselves....in other people, Oh **yes**, that is easy, isn't it! But can we become more aware of the 'weeds' growing in our own lives? And how can we weaken them without pulling them out and damaging the wheat crop in the process?..... When your lawn gets weeds in it, what do you do? Pulling

them out doesn't always solve the problem, because more weeds will come back. But if you feed the lawn extra nitrogen, it will grow stronger and will overcome the weeds. My husband John who was an agronomist always used to remind me of this, and it really does work. So...if there are weeds in our spiritual lives...we need to nourish ourselves better in spending time with God in prayer and reading Scripture and in fellowship with other believers...and continually ask God to strengthen us in our weakness by the power of the Holy Spirit... and to help us resist the power of those things that draw us away from God. We have choices to make all the time...and if we ask, God can and does give us the necessary strength and resources to follow his paths. God calls us to be active, not indifferent...and for each of us that is a unique calling within our own particular gifts...if we remain indifferent to the needs of others, we will be accountable before God. We need to encourage one another and offer Christ's hope to those we find who may be without any hope...people who are weak, or poor, or lonely, or abused, or marginalized...those for whom life is tougher than it is for ourselves. The Kingdom of God is somehow provisional, and what will be perfect at the end may seem to be very imperfect at the present time. That is where the hope comes in, which Paul writes about to the Romans and to us.

So we can thank God for God's infallible wisdom, and God's love which is so much greater than we can even begin to understand...and for God's endless patience with us. We need to trust in the judgment of God...and to pray for those who are disillusioned by evil, those who act in evil ways, and for those whose lives are caught in terrible situations which they have been unable to avoid...we pray that God may work healing in those lives. When this happens, we will find that we are an active part of God's plan in doing God's work and growing the good wheat of the harvest that leads us to God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we your people are like seeds planted by you in the same field. Together we are warmed by the sun, together we move in the wind. We soak up the rain that you provide. We ask that we may learn to help one another to grow towards what you have called us to be. Strengthen us and guide us and keep us in your love today and always. We ask all these things through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**