

A Homily for 16th Sunday of the Year, 19th July 2020
from Fr Allan

CHAPTER 13 OF MATTHEW, WEEDS AND WHEAT, MUSTARD SEED AND THE YEAST THAT LEAVENS. (Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 and Matthew 13: 24 - 43)

We continue reflecting on chapter thirteen of St Matthew's Gospel, the chapter of parables, stories that leave us with a moral or a religious message. They help us, guide us as to how we can live our everyday lives and they can bring us closer to God as we live out these lives. As we might expect today's parables continue to surprise and shock us. They invite us to take a new look at ourselves and our world. They invite us to make a change and even a transformation. The "shock" is that we might not feel as if we need to make any changes in our lives.

Over the last few months especially I personally seem to have been affected by an increasingly polarised world. I seem to be living in a world that is becoming more divided. As people move towards different "poles" - e.g. different attitudes towards Brexit, the Coronavirus - the scientists versus the politicians, the opening up of the economy or the continuing lockdown, masks or no masks - BLACK lives matter versus ALL lives matter and so on, - views and opinions seem to become stronger and more entrenched. This division leads to judgements which make reconciliation more difficult. I have heard some journalists, influencers and even politicians say that the "middle ground" is being taken away. Every point of view seems to regard the "other" as wrong while they are right. In some cases, these judgments take on a moral aspect - e.g. I am good, you are bad. In the most extreme cases you will hear a person tell someone they disagree with, "You are evil". If what we see on social media and tv is to be believed there is real hatred behind this accusation. You see, now it becomes a moral judgement.

The first parable for our consideration today seems to have something to say about this. (And by the way so does the first reading from the Book of Wisdom. Here Wisdom (feminine!) speaks of God's patience and moderation and says that God's moderation is not a result of weakness. God's justice has its roots/source in strength. Wisdom says that God's forgiveness will lead to hope and hope will, in turn, lead to our forgiveness of others. Wisdom is encapsulated in Jesus' own prayer, The Our Father). The first parable from chapter thirteen puts it this way. It talks about a man who grew wheat in a field. At night-time an enemy came and planted a certain type of weed (darnel) to grow alongside the wheat. Darnel actually wraps its own roots around the roots of the good plant so that the two are impossible to separate. The man's workers want to get rid of the weeds. The man tells them they can't do this because they might destroy the wheat - the good plant. They must wait for the harvest and then things will be sorted out.

The truth of the parable is that good and evil live alongside one another - whether we like it or not. Jesus lived with this throughout his ministry. He reached out to all sorts of people. He refused to comply with the religious separation that was a part of his experience. It was his business to seek out the lost ones. It wasn't always a popular thing to do and it cost him his life. He knew that all communities are a mixture of good and bad and it's not always easy to tell the difference.

The second parable compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed which starts off in a very small way and grows to become the biggest shrub of all. This is a parable of God's love

and care and also, a story of the fullness of growth. When we have reached the fullness of our growth as God's children we too will be able to project that same love as God. Although the kingdom has begun it hasn't reached its fullness yet.

The final parable for our consideration is a simple story of a woman making bread. She begins with wheat and she adds yeast to it so that it grows and transforms into bread. Perhaps this is the biggest surprise of all. As followers of Christ our calling is to transform ourselves and our world into people and a place that is more attuned to the Good News rather than the bad news.

It's sometimes surprising that good and evil live alongside one another. It's even surprising that other people view things differently from us. A kingdom of all people - of different races, colours, languages, social and financial status, cultures, political and religious views, seems impossible from our way of seeing things. Even change and transformation seems impossible even when we are living through it. Coming to an awareness of God's will for us and being transformed into who God calls us to be is neither easy nor quick. The promise of the parables is that God is understanding and God chooses us to be real and authentic signs of his presence in the world. We are signs of the Kingdom that has begun. The ongoing challenge is that we remain open to the transformation required of us however difficult this may be.