

6th Sunday After Trinity 2020

Welcome

Welcome in the name of Christ. God's grace, mercy and peace be with you.

Whether this is your first time joining us for our online service, or you have been with us many times before, we are delighted that you are here today, as we come together to worship Christ, who is alive and reigns with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Today, our Gospel reading assures us of the promise of the life to come, and reminds us of the call to stay faithful to Christ. No mean feat, particularly given the times we are living in now. But before we get to that, we say the Collect for today.

Today's Collect

Creator God, You made us all in your image:
may we discern you in all that we see,
and serve you in all that we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴Jesus put before the crowd another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And 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?" ²⁸He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" ²⁹But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let 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.'"

³⁶Then Jesus 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.' ³⁷He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!'

Reflection

I don't know about you, but I sometimes find it a little tricky to articulate my faith to others. I went to Church from an early age and was very lucky to have some amazing experiences as part of various youth groups, but in school, being a Christian was never particularly "cool." I remember, on one occasion, two of my friends having a flick through my Bible in the sixth form common room and chuckling to themselves at some of the more obscure passages they came across. Their discovery of Song of Solomon was a particular highlight, and if you know that book well, I won't need to say any more for you to understand why. This was quite a while ago, and I'm starting to get to the age now where counting up how many years it has been since I left school is a little unnerving, but it seems that broadly speaking, little has changed since journeying out of the classroom and into the "real world." Being a Christian, the world tells us, isn't particularly fashionable.

Today's Gospel reading, in my opinion, is one of the more challenging parables that Jesus offers, not least because it can be a little difficult to understand. Here, He speaks about good seed sown in a field. He explains that the field is the world, He is the sower and that the good seed are committed disciples who strive to follow Him faithfully. He also tells us that in the field, there are weeds planted by the enemy. Reading this contextually tells us that these particular weeds referenced within the parable are quite possibly darnel, a ryegrass which is indistinguishable from wheat until it is grown, and therefore, a sensible farmer will not attempt to separate the two out until the harvest. These weeds could perhaps best be understood as an analogy for harmful or corrupting influences in the world that are hard to identify, and which pull us away from Christ, and it is not until the harvest, or rather, the end of the age, that they will be seen for what they truly are. When this happens, Jesus tells us, the weeds will be gathered up and thrown into the furnace, whilst the good seed, the faithful disciples, rejoice in the harvest, shining like the sun in God's kingdom, thus pointing to His promise of eternal salvation.

This does not make for comfortable reading. Jesus, as He so often does, uses powerful, striking and unsettling imagery to communicate something profound about the Kingdom of Heaven. In this parable, amongst other things, we are encouraged to grow, and not to feel thwarted or discouraged by the things that try to pull us away from Jesus, and that in the long run, even if we don't always recognise them, we have nothing to fear from them. It is, however, a stark reminder that the road we tread as Christians is not easy, particularly when we consider that it is an undertaking which the rest of the world doesn't always seem to encourage or even make sense of. Being a Christian is not particularly fashionable, but then, it was never supposed to be. We are called to be in the world but not of the world. Being a Christian is a hard journey, but it is a journey which we walk alongside the risen Christ, in whom we have eternal joy, and in whom we are safe from all in the world that would pull us away from Him, if we only put our trust in Him. We are called to boldly live out our faith in a world which doesn't quite seem to understand it, but in spite of that, as our reading today tells us, we have the promise of eternal life in Christ.

The final point I would like to make before drawing to a close is that as we look to the concluding verses of this passage, which can make for somewhat uncomfortable reading, it is so important to understand that we are all, each of us, children of God, and the grace we are afforded is something that is offered to absolutely everyone, irrespective of who they are. It is a beautiful and precious gift that none of us are worthy of, and yet, in God's infinite love and compassion, it is something that is extended to all of us. Despite the weeds sown by the enemy, despite the nature of a fallen world, and because of the love of Christ, we are all invited to partake in God's glorious harvest.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you are faithful to those who follow you. We pray that as we continue to journey as your disciples, you would help us to remain steadfast in our faith, and that we would know the joy of your harvest.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for those in positions of leadership as they continue to navigate the challenges and dangers that Covid19 poses. We ask that you would grant them the wisdom and strength they need to successfully lead in these uncertain times.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for all those who do not yet know you. We ask that despite how dark and uncertain the world can seem, particularly at the moment, they might feel something of your loving presence in their lives.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord Jesus Christ, we continue to give thanks to all those who give their lives in the service of others, and ask that you would bless them and those they care for. We remember particularly, staff and residents at our Local Health Centres and at Monet Lodge, Ashley House, Holmfield and Brocklehurst.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord Jesus Christ, we know that as the good sower, you love and care for all. We remember those who are suffering from physical, mental or spiritual ill health, and pray that you would draw close to them.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks that in your glorious harvest, there is eternal salvation. We pray for those who have recently died and those whose anniversary falls at this time, as well as those who are grieving, taking a moment of quiet to call their names to mind.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your great faithfulness. As we go out into a new week, may we be strengthened by our knowledge of your love, and may all that we do glorify your holy name.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers for the sake of your son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.**

We join all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we share together the blessing of your presence.
Give us in this life knowledge of your truth,
and in the world to come life everlasting;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and evermore.
Amen.