

NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 17 JULY 2011

Rev. Anneke Oppewal

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43; Psalm 139

“To Save the Good and get rid of the Bad”

There is good and bad in each and every one of us. They grow in us together. And from the moment we are born to the moment we die they compete and cause tension. Tension which challenges us constantly to make choices for good, to be good, to bear good fruits, to be wholesome, healthy, peace loving and harmony bringing people and leave behind those parts of us that cause others pain and do damage to the world.

Reading the parable of the wheat and the weeds I think it is important to realise that first: we ourselves are like a field where good, fruit bearing wheat is growing alongside weeds that are forever threatening to choke the wheat and take over our field. And that it is virtually impossible to get rid of all the weeds, because they are part of what we are and are often as deeply or even more deeply rooted in our life than the wheat.

The parable tells us God understands this and accepts it. In human life there is wheat and there are weeds, there is good and there is bad, and often it is not even clear which is which, and they need to grow alongside each other for a bit so that we can discern what is life giving and good, and what is life diminishing and bad.

Is the inner drive I have for perfection good or bad? It makes for services that seem to inspire people and helps to put good looking keynote presentations on the screen - but at the same time it means I am never satisfied, will always feel I have fallen short of some imaginative high standard, and cause me to always be tempted to spend just one more hour to try and prepare even better ones so I will get it right this time, knowing full well I never will.

This to the despair of my family. Good or bad? I don't know....

My drive to organise and be organised helps me do my work, but at times I know it will drive people up the wall, not in the least my family when they are confronted with yet another “system” I have come up with.

I have several computer programs which help me organise the chaos of my life. Wouldn't I be better off just taking on less and being more relaxed? Is my determination to maximise my use of every minute and hour of the day good or bad? I don't know.....

God knows.

And he does, as Psalm 139 testifies: God knows of my struggles with the good and the bad inside me, knows how I try to juggle the inner forces that pull me here, there and everywhere if I let them. God knows the good and the bad in me, he even knows the grey zone that is not so easy to classify.

And God is in there with me, helping me to sort out which is which and what is what by giving me guidelines, showing me examples of lives well lived and supporting me in and through the power of the Spirit. God is there beside me, not judging me but loving me and encouraging the growth of what is good, while watching the not so good with close scrutiny, ready to pull it out and burn it, but

waiting with patience to make sure nothing good gets pulled out and burned along with it. Waiting with patience till the good has outgrown the bad and our lives can be safely cleared of what is choking and damaging it without causing harm to what is good.

For most of us this weeding and growing will take a life time, with us, only gradually, gaining awareness of what makes the wheat grow in our field and what are the weeds we ought to try and get rid of. And even then most of us will need some extra help even after we have determined which is which and what is what as we can be incredibly attached to what is unhealthy and life diminishing in us. God's help, sorting us out and applying force and fire to get rid of what is not good for us.

This not only holds true for our personal lives. It also applies to the life of the body of Christ. There it is even more complex: The different members of the body all come with their own strengths and weaknesses after all, and when those start interacting new configurations of good and bad, of life giving and life diminishing aspects of life will appear. What may be good for me and good for you may not be so good for me or you when we are together!

My passion for something may clash with someone else's more relaxed approach. My ideas about what is "proper" may collide with someone else's convictions. There are endless combinations and endless possibilities of strife and difficulty. There may be deep seated reasons for any one of our behaviours and if we know this and are able to talk about it we may be able to sort it out, but more often than not we can't, and we just get bewildered by what seems senseless obstruction.

Frustration and impatience abound in these situations. And we pull and push each other often causing damage to what could have been positive and good had we only understood how each others weeds had gotten entangled in the wheat growing in the field of the Church. I don't know about you, but I sometimes wonder if it would not be easier to give up. No Church, no body of Christ, no damage done, no weeds growing in the field.

But the wheat would then not be growing much either, would it? We would not be able to encourage each other, share with one another, give each other support, love one another and come up with the great ideas only people together can come up with.

God has called us to community because he believes we can be more, do more, change more if we work together. No matter how many weeds there will be growing alongside the wheat, plants will bear the fruits of the Spirit.

God believes that where two or three of us are together we can become the body of Christ, even where we may have, at times, to overcome the weeds which are also growing in our field.

That means that sometimes some things will need to be pulled out and burned. Things that may have grown in our field for quite a long time because they are not life giving and fruit bearing, because they don't hold up in the presence of God as good and positive contributions to the good harvest of peace and love we are called towards.

When we, as members of the body of Christ, seek to determine what are weeds and what is wheat in our field it is good to remember none of us is only one or the other. That we are all mixed bags. And that therefore the pulling out and the burning is probably best left to God with us putting up with what may, or for that matter may not be, weeds amongst the good, fruit bearing, harvest producing, wheat.

Amen.