

## TRINITY 7

I remember a couple of years back advertising 'Open Gardens' in Great Bealings, and there was a huge interest shown by the good people of Woodbridge! Although the charity was the church building, it was good old-fashioned 'nosiness' that brought in the crowds. 'We know the house is lovely, nooky, shabby chic, or falling down, but what's their garden like?' Are their roses covered in greenfly, is the water-feature something to write home about? Is there going to be decking everywhere, a greenhouse, a wildlife meadow, a swimming pool or a duck pond?

Well, today's parable isn't about gardening or bio-diversity at all, is it? The parable begins as if it might be and does mention the sore subject of weeds five times, no less, in the first half of the story.

The second half, though, is vital to the whole because like us, the disciples are lulled into thinking Jesus is wanting us to care for our gardens more tenderly, when in fact, he is teaching us about the struggle between good and evil. If you are a follower of the Son of Man, the kingdom of heaven will be yours to enjoy till the end of time. If you choose to follow instead 'the evil one' you will end up on the barbecue, like dear (unfortunate) St Laurence, persecuted for his faith by the corrupt and sinister prefect of Rome.

This dramatic story telling is the stuff of later, medieval mystery plays or, even more modern 'pantos' – when we 'boo' the baddies, when we shout out 'he/she's behind you'.

We don't have to think this through too much; it is a black and white picture, a tale of extreme opposites, and no shades of grey at all. For a non-literary audience, that is a fantastic way to make your point. If you can't read or write, you will learn from the action, from the body language, from the dark, exaggerated gestures of the devil and the contrasting bright and sunny demeanour of the righteous.

Do you know people who snarl quite a lot? Do you know people who smile quite a lot? Do you know people who cover up their intentions, their outlook on life because they can pretend to be in both camps at the same time – they are good actors?

There's a lot to reflect upon in this Parable of the weeds and, in the hidden depths of the imagery of gardening, lies a profound truth that evil exists in our world. We know it does, our criminal and human rights lawyers' know it does, the leaders of the United Nations (with all their different political leanings) know it does. And Jesus is telling us an everyday, prophetic and loving warning: know the difference between good intentions and bad, know the difference between truth and lies, and always try to make the right choices especially when, today, they are perhaps more nuanced or less clear cut.

I was cheered the other day by news that Harlow Council has named an Avenue after the President of Ukraine! The Council Leader said that when, God-willing, the war is over it will be vital to build new towns (like Harlow was built after the 2<sup>nd</sup>

World War). After the devastation and destruction, a new infrastructure will have to be built, including new green spaces, and clean flowing fountains of water. Isn't this what St Paul was saying in our Epistle today: "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

That's my take on what I believe Jesus was saying and explaining to his closest disciples. The parable of the weeds is still a contemporary parable about planning and building for something more beautiful, good, and special than, as yet, we can see. And God wants our dreams to come true: for justice, peace and righteousness to flourish in our world. And God wills for them to be embedded in our hearts and minds first of all, with His gifts of grace and mercy, guiding us and leading us.

Let us pray:

(Growing in God Diocesan Prayer....)

AMEN.