

23 Jul 2023 8th Sunday after Pentecost

God's Good Purpose in God's Good Time

Matthew 13.24–43



Grains Research and Development Corporation.
East Building, 4/4 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600

Purpose: To invest in Research, Development & Extension to create enduring profitability for Australian grain growers.

The Grains Corporation offered me very good unsolicited online advice, but their weeds and wheat were not my weeds and wheat.

Today's Gospel reading has several parables or images that bring together hope and expectation. All these parables speak of patient hope and expectation, of God's good purpose in God's good time.

We are impatient people. Like Veruca Salt in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, we want the whole world, and we want it now. What we mean by the whole world is not always bad. Although we do sometimes long for the frivolous, the passing, the things of worldly value instead of real value, we also long for God's kingdom. We want to see mercy and justice. We want to see peace on earth. We want to see creation flourish as God intended and we want to see people flourishing, knowing the love of God, and showing the love of God. We want to see God's promises coming to fruition as Jesus has assured us.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is close and coming. It is here and not yet. By living in God's ways, we are privileged to be co-creators of the kingdom. Through the love of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can bring a little light to each place and situation in which we find ourselves.

When good and bad are not perfectly clear to all, what we are not called to do is to be judge and jury. There are many controversial questions in the church and in society, many things that some consider good, some consider bad, and some say they just don't know. Our world is a mixed field of wheat and weeds, and it is sometimes hard to tell the difference, even within ourselves.

Have you ever thought you were right about something but later changed your mind? Or thought you were wrong, but as it turned out you were right after all?

One of the reasons I am not in favour of the death penalty is the certainty that no human agency can always judge without error. There will always be someone not guilty declared to be guilty and someone guilty declared not guilty. It is easier to correct an error of imprisonment than an error of death. It is the least measure of humility to leave room for unforeseen error. As it says in the Book of Genesis, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not ours. God is the only one who can judge rightly. And as Gamaliel said in Acts 5, when the apostles were arrested and brought before the Council,

³⁸ So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!

They were convinced by him.

This is good advice for us too.

In this parable, those who believe they see good seed and bad seed growing around them do not necessarily judge rightly.

Where is the wheat?



Matthew uses the Greek term *zizania*, which in modern botanical terms refers to the genus of wild rice grasses. What Matthew most likely refers to, however, is darnel or cockle, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and real wheat is evident only when the

plants mature, and the ears appear.

It is wise to wait, let both things grow together, and as things come closer to fruition, it will be clear which things are good and which are not.

Can we disagree well while we wait? Can we distinguish when to wait and when there is an immediate /imminent problem that cannot wait?

The stories of the mustard seed and the yeast are both similar. The need is to wait and see how the mustard seed grows to give shelter to the birds, and to wait and see how the yeast acts with the flour to leaven all and make it good

to eat. We have heard often that we will know what is good by the fruit that it bears.

We are natural, well-meaning fixers and we want to jump in to prevent the bad. We can certainly do that sometimes. We can build safer roads, have more just laws, teach the next generation how to care for one another and their own future – physical and spiritual.

However, we cannot guess the future or punish acts that have not taken place. We cannot imprison the one who might commit a crime. We cannot destroy the thing that might turn out to be not what we expect. We know that when we shun or demean people without prior cause, we can even bring about the very thing we were seeking to prevent. Our misguided efforts can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

So, we must let the plants in the field grow, and in God's good time the things that bring life and the things that impede life will become clear.

Here it is useful to look not so much at our neighbours but at ourselves. Remembering our efforts to avoid sin and to act in Godly ways, we know that our track record is not always perfect. But at the end of the age, in the time of judgement, God will send his angels to collect all the causes of sin, those weeds that have taken root in the field of our lives. Some of the suffering of this present time comes from external causes but some comes from within our own selves.

When those causes of sin are removed, then the sinful self will also be removed or destroyed. The me that has suffered the anguish and the fruit of my own wrong-doing, even my unknown sins, will be burned away; and the me that yearns for the righteousness of God will shine in the fullness of God's kingdom.

When Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah 61, he read,

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives*

*and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

He does not read the next line that says,

and the day of vengeance of our God;”

Instead, he speaks a deeper truth. He rolls up the scroll and says “today, this Scripture has been fulfilled.”

The coming of Jesus is good news.

The judgement of God is also a time of good news, a time of hope and joyful expectation. From our Romans reading, *When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

Here is the vital part for today’s message:

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. (Romans 8.15b-19)

All of the parables we heard today speak of patient hope and expectation - God’s good purpose in God’s good time.

And so we pray, *Come Lord Jesus. Amen.*