

Homily for 6th Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 13 24 to 30 36 to 43

Is it just me or do weeds grow quicker than garden plants?

You should see our back garden!

(Or maybe you shouldn't!!!)

This year I have been slightly pre-occupied and gardening has taken a bit of a back seat.

Consequently the weeds have had a splendid year!

In fact I have been thinking about having a harvest festival for weeds! Perhaps instead of a "Chelsea Flower Show" we could have a "Rastrick Weed Show."

If we did I think I would be in with a good chance of medal.

Weeding seems to be an endless battle.

If you are a gardener you spend hours weeding so I wonder do farmers spend ages weeding a field too?

You get a clear patch and before you know it they are all back again and it seems as though they have brought their friends with them!

It has been said - "a weed is only a flower in the wrong place!" I know where that place is - that wrong place is our back garden!

My problem is - when I try to pull the weeds up I usually find I'm pulling up the plants I want to save.

The roots seem to get all muddled up so they all come up together. Do I always pull up the right plants? Sadly no! Jean used to say do you remember we used to have a ** I would blush at that point or quickly change the subject!

For me telling the difference between weeds and cultivated plants is quite difficult. In fact I rather like the flowers of some weeds that I thought were plants.

How farmers manage is beyond me!

I understand there is one particular weed that causes them lots of problems. It's called darnel and apparently you can't tell the difference between darnel and wheat until the seed heads appear and by then it's too late. When the plants are fully grown the roots are all muddled up so if you try to pull up the darnel you end up pulling the wheat up too.

In biblical times there were no fancy machines to sort out weeds and cultivated plants. The farmer just had to wait until harvest and then separate the wheat and the darnel. If they made a mistake they had a big problem because Darnel is poisonous!

Perhaps Jesus told this parable about weeds because the people would understand what he was talking about.

So what was he getting at?
I wonder could it be that good and evil are muddled up together?
Perhaps that's the same today?
Is there something that is without question wholly good?
Likewise is there something that is totally bad?
It seems to me that in this world good and bad are well and truly mixed up.
Perhaps it's the same as the plants - we can't root out all evil without risking destroying some good too.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote.

"The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of their own heart?"

Just think what would happen if God decided to destroy all those who have a little evil in their hearts?
There'd be nobody left!

The church itself falls a long way short of perfection.
I guess that's because it's full of sinners who are working their way towards being saved.
But none of us are there yet!
None of us are completely saved.
I believe we all have to recognise our imperfections.

Could it be we are all members of our churches because we know we are a work in progress?
I guess we are here - amongst other things - to speed ourselves along the road to salvation.
If anyone says to us the church is full of sinners then we should reply:-
Yes that's true!
Why not come and join us there is always room for one more sinner!
I think it's sad but the church isn't yet what Jesus wanted.
Every Sunday we say the Creed - a symbol of what we aspire to something to aim for.
In the teaching world there is a phrase to describe how children are progressing and I think it applies to us too:-
Teachers say children are "working towards!"
I think we too are "working towards!"
Working towards salvation.
But that's not where it ends - there are other things to think about too
We have to admit that as a church we are not united.
We haven't achieved holiness.
We are working towards those things.
And one day>>>>
Or perhaps we could say "God is working on us!"

We need to remember that our walk with Jesus is a lifelong quest. (I was going to say journey but it's more than that. It demands effort. It's not like an afternoon stroll.)

Someone once said (I can't remember who):-

"Grace is never a stationary thing, it is always found in becoming."

I think that can be applied to the church today.

Perhaps it means God's love is not found in a church full of goody goodies.

Instead God's love shines out from a church made up of forgiven sinners, who God is still working on!!

Here in our churches we are aware we are not the finished article. We know that God is working on us.

The reality of that is in the answer to this question:-

If the church wasn't made up of sinners where would we go?

I remember the Billy Graham crusade for Mission England. One night a group of people attended a meeting at Bramall Lane in Sheffield. They listened to what was said and then when the appeal was made they left.

They told us they had been impressed by what had been said but they looked at Billy Graham and then at themselves and couldn't see how they could get from where they were to where Billy Graham was.

It seemed the gulf for them was just too great.

How sad that was.

They thought you had to be able to dot all the i's and cross all the t's to be a Christian.

They didn't realise we are all a work in progress.

I believe as Christians we have all caught a glimpse of what God wants for us.

Perhaps a glimpse of perfection in Jesus.

However, we are all just too aware that we need more work.

That is the crucial gift of being a Christian.

Paul knew that.

He said:-

"I press on towards the goal."

Remember it's inevitable that weeds and flowers will grow side by side until the harvest time.

And that's the same in us.

"The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of their own heart?"

Perhaps what we have to do is accept that even we ourselves are as weedy as those we criticize.

And then to ask for God's forgiveness so that by the time God gathers in his harvest we will be slightly better than we are today.

May God bless you and your garden. (*weeds and all!*)

Rev. Stephen