**Sunday 19th July 2020 – Act of Worship**

*Service leader: Revd Richard Bradley*

*Family Talk and Sermon – Daniel Harris*

**Welcome and opening words**

Good morning! Welcome to worship today on the 19th July.

In preparing for my part in the service today I was drawn to these words from a Christian song by Tim Hughes called: “God in my living” and the first verse goes like this….I invite you to let these words enter into your Spirit today….

***“God in my living,  
there in my breathing,  
God in my waking,***

***God in my sleeping,  
God in my resting,***

***there in my working,  
God in my thinking,***

***God in my speaking.***

***Be my everything,***

***be my everything,  
be my everything,***

***be my everything.”*** *(Tim Hughes © 2005 Thankyou Music/Capitol CMG Publishing/Integritymusic.com) ccli 169737*

Let us pray….

Lord of everything and everyone, we come before You and worship You today. Speak to us and guide us we pray. Amen.

We sing our opening hymn….

**Hymn:** **O breath of life**

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| 1..O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,  revive Your church with life and power;  O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,  and fit Your church to meet this hour. | 2..O Breath of love, come breathe within us,  renewing thought and will and heart;  come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,  revive Your church in every part. |
| 3..O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,  till humbly we confess our need;  then, in Your tenderness remake us,  revive, restore - for this we plead. | 4.. Revive us, Lord; is zeal abating  while harvest fields are vast and white?  Revive, us Lord, the world is waiting -  equip Thy Church to spread the light. |
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**Prayers of Approach**

Gracious and Holy God, we acknowledge your presence with us today as we gather in the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In our opening words this morning we heard how You are present with us at all times and in all places. We praise You for this truth and may we never doubt it.

As we come in prayer we bring You praise and worship. We thank You for Your goodness and Your presence in our lives.

We praise You for the seasons…we praise You for friends and family…we praise You for our church family and we praise You that you call us to be part of Your worldwide family of the Church where we can find fellowship, faith and fun!

But we are conscious of our weaknesses and failings. For those times when we might have knowingly done wrong in thought, word or deed. And we ask for Your forgiveness.

We are conscious of times we might have unknowingly done wrong in thought, word or deed. And we ask for Your forgiveness, knowing that when we say sorry to You, You forgive us fully.

We pause for a moment in prayer to offer our own prayers of praise and confession…….

Lord, in your merciful grace, hear all our prayers. Amen.

**Hymn: An army of ordinary people**

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| 1..An army of ordinary people  a kingdom where love is the key,  a city, a light to the nations,  heirs to the promise are we.  A people whose life is in Jesus,  a nation together we stand;  only through grace are we worthy,  inheritors of the land. | Chorus: *A new day is dawning,*  *a new age to come,*  *when the children of promise*  *shall flow together as one:*  *a truth long neglected,*  *but the time has now come,*  *when the children of promise*  *shall flow together as one.* |
| 2.. A people without recognition,  but with Him a destiny sealed,  called to a heavenly vision:  His purpose shall be fulfilled.  Come, let us stand strong together,  abandon ourselves to the King;  His love shall be ours forever,  this victory song we shall sing. | Chorus: *A new day is dawning,*  *a new age to come,*  *when the children of promise*  *shall flow together as one:*  *a truth long neglected,*  *but the time has now come,*  *when the children of promise*  *shall flow together as one.* |
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**Family Talk**

We are going to play a new version of that classic TV quiz “Ask the Family”.

You get a maximum oft points for each round

I am going to show you pictures of famous film or TV characters.

For one point I want the character’s name; for another point I want to know if they are friend or foe.

1. 2. 3.

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4. 5. 6.

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**Answers:**

1. Princess Leah - friend (Star Wars).
2. Pheonix Bucanan - foe (Paddington 2)
3. Snoke - foe (Star Wars)
4. Kaitniss Everdeen - friend (Hunger Games)
5. Kristoff - friend (Frozen)
6. Knuckles - friend (Paddington 2)

How did you do?

I must confess to being a bit of a Paddington fan. When my family saw the film, I asked them who was friend or foe. Paddington was obviously the friend, and Pheonix Bucanan was the foe. But Knuckles was a bit harder to work out. He was serving a prison sentence for an unknown misdemeanour. He was the prison chef, cooked badly, and everyone was scared of him. But he befriended Paddington, who found himself innocently imprisoned, and helped Paddington escape to clear his name.

I explained to my boys that good people can do bad things while bad people can surprise us and do good things.

Things are not always crystal-clear.

The can be a bit fuzzy and muddy sometimes.

We need to have our thinking hats on when we are trying to work it all out!

**Hymn: Hear the call of the kingdom (sung left to right)**

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| 1..“Hear the call of the kingdom,  lift your eyes to the King;  let His song rise within you  as a fragrant offering  of how God, rich in mercy,  came in Christ to redeem  all who trust in His unfailing grace. | 2.. Hear the call of the Kingdom  to be children of light  with the mercy of heaven,  the humility of Christ;  walking justly before Him,  loving all that is right,  that the life of Christ may shine through us. |
| Chorus: *King of heaven, we will answer the call.*  *We will follow, bringing hope to the world,*  *filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim*  *salvation in Jesus’ name.* | 3.. Hear the call of the Kingdom  to reach out to the lost  with the Father’s compassion  in the wonder of the cross,  bringing peace and forgiveness,  and a hope yet to come:  let the nations put their trust in Him. |
| Chorus: *King of heaven, we will answer the call.*  *We will follow, bringing hope to the world,*  *filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim*  *salvation in Jesus’ name.* | Keith Getty and Stuart Townend  ©2006 ThankYou Music  ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

**Bible Reading: Matthew 13:24-34**

**Parable of the Wheat and Weeds**

24 Here is another story Jesus told: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. 25 But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. 26 When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew.

27 “The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’ 28 “‘An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed.

“‘Should we pull out the weeds?’ they asked.

29 “‘No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.’”

**Parable of the Mustard Seed and the yeast**

31 Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.” 33 Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.” 34 Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.

Thanks be to God for this reading from His Word.

**Sermon**

I want to explore a simple question today: What sort of world should we live in?

Should we live in a world where morality is crystal-clear, where goodness is recognised and anything that is toxic to the common good is rejected?

Or should we live in a world where morality is recognised for what it is - sometimes cloudy and often complex?

Crystal-clear, or cloudy and complex - what do you think?

People are mixed bag. We all see the world in different ways.

For example, some people prefer their TV dramas to have complex characters with equally complicated plots. However, other people who come from complicated backgrounds may yearn for simplicity in their television viewing.

But I want to suggest that we often long for the certainty of a crystal-clear moral world.

The desire to see the world like this goes back a long way.

So let’s do some investigating. So let’s do some digging in the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

To start off we need to consider what sort of world did Jesus and his disciples live in.

Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the weeds is rich in historical imagery.

It is so rich, you can shake a stick at it. The nation of Israel was often symbolised as a vineyard or a garden - a comparison that still resonates with us today. The quality of its national character was hopefully like a good wine or a bountiful harvest. This imagery runs throughout the Bible, from the Garden of Eden through to Jesus’ parables. And we see that theme running through our parable today.

This parable features a time of harvesting where the good wheat will be separated from weeds.

The intended image is clear. It is drawing us in - encouraging us to make the distinction between the good, the bad and the ugly. The traditional imagery of wheat being separated from the chaff is a rich seam which runs through the Old Testament. For example, Malachi 4.1 says, for example: “See! The day is coming, burning like an oven, when all of the arrogant and the evildoers will be like stubble. The day that comes shall burn them up!”

Was the world that people desired close to realisation? Alas, No. Things were not going as they should be. God’s promise to bring the Hebrews’ suffering and exile to an end was not yet realised.

These people were angry. We celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem every year, but often miss the nuance. We think that the people crying “Hosanna!” were in carnival spirit.

We think that the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a bit like a 1980s March for Jesus.

But this was more akin to a protest march with risk of spiralling into violence.

The nation of Israel longed for freedom to self-govern. A revolutionary movement existed seeking to bring about liberation from the Roman oppressors. However, the ruling classes were trying to maintain the status quo, either for their own vested interests or fear of Roman reprisals against any possible uprising.

Within all of this, Jesus was walking a fine line announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God while avoiding being stereotyped as a Che Guevara- type revolutionary.

But there was a strong desire for a fresh start in society.

People were tired of the murky politics of the Roman occupation.

They wanted a bright new future of home rule.

And within this seething and bubbling caldron of anger and unrest, Jesus shared the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

So, depending on your point of view, it wasn’t too hard to imagine who could be seen as the wheat, and who would be ostracised as the chaff or weeds. In such troubled times, the natural desire is to identify, victimise and vanquish the enemy. And we see this reaction being dramatised in the parable.“Where did these weeds come from?” The workers said to the land owner. “Shall we go and pick them now?”

The ancient world seemed to operate within the two extremes of those who were included and those who were excluded. The biblical narrative seems to frame the world in such terms too.

So let’s pause to consider if things much different today. What is our world like?

One possible answer to that question comes from a recent open letter from a collective group of scholars, writers and academics, including our own children’s author J.K. Rowling:

*“Our cultural institutions are facing a moment of trial. Powerful protests for racial and social justice are leading to overdue demands for police reform, along with wider calls for greater equality and inclusion across our society …*

*But this needed reckoning has also intensified a new set of moral attitudes and political commitments that tend to weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favour of ideological conformity.*

*… But it is now all too common to hear calls for swift and severe retribution in response to perceived transgressions of speech and thought.*

*The restriction of debate, whether by a repressive government or an intolerant society, invariably hurts those who lack power and makes everyone less capable of democratic participation.”*

According to this open letter, the desire for a crystal-clear society, with clearly defined boundaries, is a loud voice indeed.

They claim this voice is damaging democracy and leads to further alienation of people.

Is this true? Let’s bring these two worlds together as we consider this in light of our parable.

All societies must have some periods of reckoning as they work out how to adjust and respond to a changing world.

On the grand scale, Jesus’ parable clearly shows that there is going to be a final reckoning at a future time only known to God.

But until then the parable makes it very clear that the wheat is to remain growing with the weeds.

If the weeds are pulled out of the ground too early, this will harm the wheat too.

If critical, rebellious or unorthodox voices are forcibly silenced, ignored or even persecuted - this can harm us all. The implication is clear. The wheat has to find a way to grow alongside the weeds.

People have to find a way to co-exist with each other. Why is this?

I used to work with a foraging company who supplied wild foods to the top restaurants in London.

I remember delivering stinging nettles to some of these restaurants. I remember my boss clearly telling me that there is no such thing as “weeds”. His knowledge of flora and fauna was encyclopedic. He could visit any brown field site, have a scout around, and find wild plants which could be used in gourmet meals and salads.

This is the point, I believe, Jesus is driving at. In the economy of the Kingdom of God, weeds are valued. This is not because the moral compass is getting confused. God is playing the long game - the waiting game - giving us time to grow, to move from darkness to light, to move from weed to wheat. This is the call and life of continual repentance following Jesus Christ.

This waiting game is demonstrated in the other parables of the mustard seed and the yeast.

These grow over time. They are not instant arrivals. God knows, we want to solve the world’s problems instantly. But God is reminding us to live faithfully with patience.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to view the world in perspective of the Kingdom of God.

In my mind, there is no doubt about that. But we are reminded that we live in a world that is both cloudy and complex, a world that is muddy and fuzzy.

And to quote the rock band Led Zeppelin, it often leaves us feeling dazed and confused.

But we are encouraged to be patient with this world.

We are to engage with voices of differing opinions with hope, gentleness and respect.

We are to maintain all our relationships within that triangle of loving God, loving our neighbours and loving ourselves. This is the kite-mark of the Kingdom of God.

One day there will be a final reckoning, but until then God calls us to keep our hearts and minds on His mission.

How do we respond to this challenge?

**Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray…..

Lord, as we have heard Your Word from Daniel we take a moment or two of quiet reflection to reflect on what Your shared with us through Your Word read and preached….

Loving God as we respond to Your Word in prayer we look out into the world…..at a time when every nation is affected in some way by Covid-19…we pray for those who have lost loved ones and friends to this virus. Comfort them we pray. We pray for those who are suffering from the virus whether at home or in hospital – we pray for Your healing hand to be upon them.

We pray for those who care for those who are suffering…we thank you for their skills and expertise in doing all they can to alleviate suffering.

We pray for peace in the world. Where there is war…unrest…political instability…we pray for Your power and presence.

We pray for those who are trafficked, used and abused. We pray they would be released from their captivity and suffering.

We pray for the Church…especially those places opening up after the lockdown. May they know Your presence and protection. We pray for those churches who don’t feel it is right for them to open. We pray for wisdom and understanding.

We pray for those in our families…comfort them with Your presence, Lord. We pray for those we know who are isolating and feeling vulnerable…be with them we pray.

And we pray for ourselves – that we might grow closer to Jesus in all we say and do. May Your Holy Spirit guide us and help us to be Christlike in all we say, do and think.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Hymn: I want to serve the purpose of God** *(verse, chorus, verse, chorus….)*

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation. I want to serve the purpose of God while I am alive. I want to give my life, for something that will last forever, O, I delight, I delight to do Your will. | 2.. I want to build with silver and gold in my generation. I want to build with silver and gold while I am alive. I want to give my life for something that will last forever, O, I delight, I delight to do Your will. |
| 3.. I want to see the Kingdom of God in my generation. I want to see the Kingdom of God while I am alive. I want to give my life for something that will last forever, O, I delight, I delight to do Your will. | 4.. I want to see the Lord come again in my generation. I want to see the Lord come again while I am alive. I want to give my life for something that will last forever, O, I delight, I delight to do Your will. |
| Chorus: *What is on Your heart? Show me what to do. Let me know Your will and I will follow You.  What is on Your heart? Show me what to do. Let me know Your will and I will follow You.* | Mark Altrogge  ©1982 People of Destiny International/CopyCare  ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |

**Blessing:**

May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who is in our hoping, our dreaming, our watching, our waiting, our laughing, our weeping, our hurting and our healing, be our everything today and always.

Amen.

*The words of the blessing are adapted from verse 2 of the song I read from at the start of the service:*

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