

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
2014.07.20

Gen. 28:10-19a (Wisdom 12:13,16-19; Is. 44:6-8) Ps. 139:1-12,23-24 (Ps.86: 11-17)
 Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 16-19)

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God
 Romans 8:19

Christians have been accused of being so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use with their feet firmly planted in midair. Karl Marx certainly thought so and accused the Church of preaching pie in the sky when you die. Unfortunately there is considerable truth to these descriptions and accusations. But they are not applicable to the life and teaching of Jesus. An appropriate title for his preaching and teaching would be “Lessons from Life”. That is what his parables are – lessons from life.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel and in the parables which we are considering on these Sundays after Pentecost in this liturgical Year we are reminded how grounded Jesus teaching is. Jesus points to the flowers of the field and the birds of the air as examples of God’s provision and care. He exhorts his disciples to be like salt that seasons and leaven that causes the dough to rise – to be lights that shine. He addresses the poor, the bereaved, the humble, and the persecuted. He assures them that they are blessed. Now, not in the hereafter, because they are precious in God’s sight. He teaches in parables based on incidents from daily life – sowing and harvesting as conveying insights from the daily life and work of the people into the life and work of God..

In addition to the examples taken from cultivating and growing that which gives nurture to life there are teachings from relationships between shepherds and sheep, labourers and land owners, Jews and Samaritans, sinners and the self-proclaimed righteous, fathers and sons, Jews and Samaritans and the compassionate ministry Jesus extended to widows and orphans and women and children on the lowest rung of the social ladder. No one or nothing is worthless in God’s sight however maimed and wounded they may be. Those were his particular concern. The list is long and impressive and expresses the incarnational nature of Jesus’ life and teaching.

Jesus teaches that there is a dynamic within nature and within human relations which is the dynamic of the rule of God. Many of the parables are introduced with the phrase, ‘the kingdom of God is like...’ And then goes on to describe some every day event. The life of God is among and within us reaching out to all and particularly the marginalised, the poor, the lame, the blind and those who the self-righteous and religious call sinners.

Christianity has always understood that our life has its origin and end in God. In the Eastern Christian tradition human life, created in the image of God, finds its fulfilment in the life of God. But God has not made us robots. We have freedom of choice in matters relating to our life in God and it is only as we learn to choose that which is our wholeness and salvation that we will we experience the life of the children of God. I was interested to find that one of the earliest teachers of the Church, Iraneaus (died circa 202), who became bishop of Lyon in Gaul, taught that creation is on-going. Contrary to the generally accepted understanding of the significance of creation he taught that Adam was not created a perfect being, but was created for perfection. Unfortunately, like all of us, he used his God-given freedom to seek independence from the divine purpose, which led to his finding himself captive to the powers of sin and death. Life is given for us to grow in grace and compassion as those who are made in the image of God through the agency of the Spirit of God. In Jesus, the child of God, we are able to recover our relationship with God. Iraneaus referred to salvation as recapitulation. Restoring us to the humanity inspired by divinity – getting our heads and our hearts right again.

In Christ we are caught up in the process of the eager longing of creation for the revelation of the children of God. It is not to be realised in some final formulation, some perfect political platform, some scientific discovery, which will reveal to us the ‘god-particle’. God cannot be captured in our definitions. God draws us into the life that is beyond definition into the dynamic of the Spirit of God. Who can define love? We can only describe that which reveals love.

I was very interested in an article in the *Cape Times* on Wednesday by the veteran political commentator Alistair Sparks under the heading ‘Truth is that there is no truth’. He tells of a conversation he had with Countess Marion Dönhof, a German

aristocrat who was active in opposing Hitler. She escaped being executed by the Nazis for her association with those who attempted to assassinate Hitler. She also managed to escape the advance of the Red Army riding for seven weeks on horseback to Hamburg in northern Germany. This remarkable woman became the editor of the German newspaper *Die Zeit*. On one of her trips to South Africa Alistair Sparks asked her, "In your long life is there one great truth above all other truths that you have learnt?" After a long pause she replied, "Yes. There is no truth. There is no true way of world order. Hegel was right. The pendulum swings".

The one great truth is that we do not have the truth, but are ever seeking that which will bring wholeness and happiness, that which will enable us to live in peace and become compassionate people; people in whom the Spirit of God lives and works for good. That is the dynamic of our destiny.

In his life and teaching Jesus holds that dynamic before us. He develops and expands the Judaistic spiritual tradition contained in the Law and the Prophets which is about the dynamic relation between good and evil. Good is that which emerges from the struggle between right and wrong, that which is good because it has identified and overcome evil. Evil is always a force that is a distortion of the good, It has no independent existence. It is a lie

In his parables Jesus illustrates the dynamic from incidents in our lives. In the parable of the Wheat and the Tares Jesus draws attention to the farmer who sows good seed in his field – which he goes on to compare with the Son of man sowing the seed of the Word of God in the world. But an enemy comes and sows weeds. The weeds have been identified as a growth looks very much like wheat but when it matures and is harvested its seeds contaminate the wheat and make it worthless.

It seems to me that we have here a picture of the pattern of all our endeavours to produce the good. Evil disguises itself as good so that we are conned into allowing it to invade our lives.. In theological mythology the devil is a fallen angel. If evil were immediately evident and could be eradicated immediately establishing and maintaining the good would be much easier. But evil always comes disguised as the good and enters the efforts of those working for good to hide itself.

We need look no further than the last twenty years of democracy in South Africa where the 'comrades' who came to liberate people from oppression have now emerged as weeds that contaminate the good that has been gained and the progress that has been made towards a good life for all in this country.

So too in every human endeavour and striving to establish the good, the weeds disguised as good growth are sown. In health care and education, the good efforts are taken over by those who see it as an opportunity to make profits – so the only good facilities are available to the wealthy.

Nor is the Church free of the weeds of those who seek status rather than service. Jesus was scathing about religious leaders who exercised their office to be recognised and rewarded rather than to serve others. By the Middle Ages the Church was so choked by these weeds that it needed radical reformation. And the same type of weeds continue to contaminate the Church. In the charismatic churches we see the exponential growth of prosperity cults. The word has become a weed disguised as good seed.

These are clever weeds. They survive by getting us to believe they are wheat. Even the Scriptures has weeds in it, disguised as the word and will of God. Jesus challenged some of the prescriptions of the Old Testament. 'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times... But I say to you' He questioned whether laws which required an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth reflected the mind and heart of God and would create anything but a vengeful society. He said his God required that one should love one's enemies as well as one's neighbours. In the Old Testament one's neighbour was understood to be those of one's own kith and kin – Jews should love Jews, but could eradicate anyone else with a clear conscience – in fact they could claim that God required it!. Old Testament passages describing genocide, masquerading as the word of God were in fact weeds that do not produce the fruit of the Spirit.

We have also identified some verses in the New Testament that are used to produce bad fruit. New Testament passages were used in support of slavery, of keeping women in an inferior position. Verses were and are quoted in equating sex with sin

and marriage as a spiritually compromised arrangement for the continuation of the human race. We are also beginning to recognise that those verses which condemn homosexuality should not be used to condemn all persons who seek to live upright lives as people of homosexual orientation. Many of the greatest Church musicians, painters and sculptors have been homosexual. They have shown great insight and sensitivity in their depiction and interpretation of the sacred.

It has taken the Church a long time to identify these weeds, because it had to recognise the fruit that such teaching produces, before it could gather these things up and burn them.

We are in no position to eradicate these growths because too many are conned into thinking they are good. We wait for the harvest. We wait for the Spirit of God to reveal the fruit. By their fruit you shall know them.

And what about the weeds in our own lives? Seeds sown by tradition, education, culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, social status, which are good and feel good, but their fruits are pride and breed a sense of superiority and the exclusion of others which show that they are weeds disguised as good seed.

Our task is not to be too concerned about the weeds – or start tearing them up because we may pull up the wheat as well. But it is important to recognise a weed when you see one and not mistake it for wheat!

God sends God's angels who are responsible for the harvest. They recognise and root out those that bear bad seed so that we may be fed by that which is good.

Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. And we are those children in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen