**Matthew 13:24-30,36-43**

He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’ He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

When my children were young there was a series of books that they loved. The earlier books I read to them, and as they got older we fought (yes, me too) over who read the latest release first. On more than one occasion I queued at midnight to get the new book and read through night before handing it over. The series of course was Harry Potter. A glorious tale of good and bad and the fight between the two. It was really very clear who was on the side of the hero, and who was fighting against him. Except in one case. There was one character about whom I could not make up my mind. He seemed bad, except…. there was just something that made me question. As the series went on I went back and forth about Professor Snape and his place in the ranks of dark and light, unclear about whether he was good or bad as clues led me this way and that. Eventually I decided I was just going to have to wait and see.

I’m not going to give the ending away, but the pondering I did came to mind as I read today’s Gospel reading. Here we have the parable of the good and bad seed. Not the first seed sowing we’ve heard about lately; Barry shared a wonderful reflection on the parable of the sower last week. But here the focus is on the seed, not the ground in which it lands. Our poor farmer sows his seed and then has his field sabotaged by an enemy, who plants tares – darnel in some texts – in amongst his wheat. And there’s very little he can do. Just as I couldn’t tell whether the character of Snape was going to turn out good or bad, so darnel and wheat are impossible to tell apart until they are fully grown. We could argue that it would have been easier to just dig up the field and plant a new crop, but the farmer doesn’t do that; rather he chooses to allow the seed to germinate and grow, feeding both darnel and wheat and caring for both equally until the very end when the difference becomes clear. Only then can he separate them out, keeping the good and throwing away the bad.

I love this image of God. A God who looks at us, at his creation, and despite our mistakes and our difficulties and all the things we mess up, continues to nurture and love and support, working always to bring to wholeness all that he has made. Taking no chance of losing anything that could be saved, but tending all until there can be no doubt that he has safely gathered in everything that is his.

And there is the lesson for us. We are clearly shown that the separation between the wheat and the weeds is not as clear cut as the media, politicians, or even our own opinions would often have us believe. And we are not the ones to make that judgment. Jesus is clear about that.

“Let them grow together until the harvest,” he says. Jesus shows more interest in growth than in clearing the field. He is willing to wait and to be patient.

But I don’t think we are being told to sit back and do nothing. Just as the farmer continued to feed and water his field of mixed crops, so there is plenty to do and it will be a challenge.

Michael Marsh, an American theologian puts it like this

The words that are translated as “let them” in Jesus’ statement, “Let them grow…” can also be translated as forgive them. It’s the same words Jesus spoke from the cross in St. Luke’s account of the gospel when he says, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). Even then, even on the cross, Jesus is unwilling to pull up the weeds.

There is no place in Jesus’ gospel for Christian vigilantism, by word or by action, against another or against ourselves. Instead, Jesus commands love. Love your enemy. Love your neighbour. Love yourself. Love God.

And love the weeds. The Gospel is always a challenge, so yes love them and forgive them. And maybe, in the forgiving and the loving the wheat finds the strength to grow and separate itself from the weeds and show its real shape.

Forgive the weeds? Love the weeds? Remember, I told you the gospel is always a challenge. So, yes, forgive them. Love them. Maybe that’s how the wheat begins to disentangle its roots from the weeds and show itself to be wheat and not weeds. Maybe love and forgiveness are what life in the mixed field of God’s kingdom and this world is like.