

SERMON TRINITY 9 2008 A – 20/07/08

‘Let both of them grow together until harvest’

When I was ten years old, my Grandfather had yet another heart attack, one of a succession, a condition which thirteen years later brought his life to an end.

In those days you were confined to bed for a fortnight and were not allowed to move at all. This occurred during the summer holidays, and I camped out at my grandparents house so I was able to run up and down stairs catering for his every need, and so that he could wholly rest as was prescribed by the doctor.

I arrived one morning and he asked me to do a spot of gardening, namely to clean out and tidy up the greenhouse which was of considerable size and to weed the garden beds.

So alongside running upstairs with food and drinks I set to with the task.

After about a week or so, I had removed everything from the greenhouse, whitened the windows, brushed, cleaned, disinfected the ledges, ‘tarted up’ the plants and replaced them in the neatest of fashions.

Furthermore, I had weeded all the flower beds. What ‘looked good’ I kept and what didn’t, I didn’t.

The finished work looked really fine, and I, as a ten year old, very eager to help was really quite proud. I was really quite proud that is, until about a week later when my grandfather had recovered sufficiently to survey his estate.

Well, it was like something out of a horror movie. Everything in the greenhouse was on the point of dying, for reasons I have never discovered, and what would have been prize begonias had found their way as weeds to the compost heap. My Grandfather, a very understanding and most loving of people had to have at least one extra heart tablet that day...and what ever talent I had been given, I think my Grandfather had wished I had kept it buried... buried along with me. I was mortified!

Ever since, despite being fascinated about the latin and greek names for various things horticultural, I would not know a peony from a pansy, a clematis from a chive, and almost a rhododendron from a stick of rhubarb! Ever since my horticultural confidence has stayed buried and when Latin names tripped off the tongues of many at home, my sole concern was whether what was being talked about was a weed or not.

But this is not so absurd as it may seem...

‘Let both of them grow together until harvest’

The weed, or darnel referred to in the Gospel for today...*zizania* in Greek and *Iolium temulentum* in Latin...(some things never change!) in its early stages looks identical to wheat, and to pull the *zizania* up as a weed without confusing it with the wheat is literally impossible.

Now if I had known that this possibility of confusion reigned in the hearts and minds of first century Jewish farmers, I would have felt rather better about my grandfathers flower beds and would not have been scarred for life.

And get this, it appears that if you had left the darnel long enough for the difference to be seen, and then tried to pull it up, apparently you were no better off, because the roots by then would have become so entangled that to pull the weed out separate from the wheat was again impossible. Hence the injunction in the parable:

‘Let both of them grow together until harvest’

There is little doubt that in allegorical terms Jesus was referring to the ‘wheat’, the Christian Church and the ‘weeds’ the synagogue should remain together until the harvest, that is the expected end of the world which in his time was expected very soon.

But the will to root out *now* that which is countenanced as 'weed' from the church today is very much alive and kicking.

Surrounding the Lambeth Conference there are factions which want to root out now those others who are *obviously* not wheat, and as weeds consign them to be burnt in the fires of hell.

There is a singular lack of patience, and a desire to run headlong into premature and vindictive judgment of the other in many different areas of ecclesial life. This presently finds its focus surrounding issues such as homosexuality, women bishops and the like which fly in the face of the loving patient nature of God. The conduct of many within such arenas, far from thinking a purer gospel will be engendered, actually does nothing for the Kingdom of God and its growth.

The 'wise gardener' in the parable is seen to allow different plants to grow together until it becomes clear which sort of plant is which.

The 'wise gardener' is seen to exhibit ultimate patience, to be very willing to be uncertain, to be ill at ease, by giving every benefit of every doubt going until the real nature of what is all too plain to see is revealed.

The problem is by often using very selective methods of discerning that which is right or wrong, for example, a literalist view of the Bible, we can be tempted to make black and white decisions about all sorts of

things and end up wishing to uproot the 'obviously black' hoping that the 'obviously white' will remain unscathed and pure.

The decision made by various bishops to boycott Lambeth is one example, together with its surrender of the possibility of any discussion face to face between 'christians'.

The decision by Rowan, our Archbishop not to invite Bishop Gene Robinson, the 9th Bishop of New Hampshire in the United States is another example for me of premature judgement which may well return to haunt him, in that in terms of those who might have hopefully returned to the fold because of such judgmental action, seems to have failed.

One, who according to Time magazine is presently listed as one of the top hundred most influential people in the world, that is Archbishop Akinola of Nigeria, is renowned for his long held fundamentalistic views concerning homosexuality. However, using the same principle, a veil seems to be drawn over the issue of bigamy which is at the very least tolerated in Nigerian society and hardly commented on by the Archbishop until May of this year. What one might call 'selective judgement' in this way for anyone let alone an Archbishop is fraught with danger.

'Judge not lest ye be judged'...has a particular authority here.

‘Let both of them grow together until harvest’

As with many issues within the present worldwide Church there needs space to be given for real engagement ,charity, patience, mutual respect and self-giving love in order for a balanced process of discernment to be worked through.

So many times, the Church over the centuries and especially in recent times, has been seen to exhibit a narrowness, a fear, an introvertedness, a joylessness which lacks confidence in a Christ who rose from the dead and is alive for evermore.

‘Let both of them grow together until harvest’

Let Christ’s charity be ours and let God’s judgement remain God’s.