

Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 8.12-25; Isa.44.6-8 (+ Sun. Sch. Talk)
St. Andrew's Totteridge: 8:00 am & 10:00 am
Sunday 20th July 2014: 5th Sunday after Trinity

*In the power of the Holy Spirit, may God bless the voice that speaks and the ears that hear,
through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

We're all familiar I'm sure with the great old masters who, over the last few centuries, painted such amazing works of art; people like Rembrandt, Titian or Vermeer. This last artist, Vermeer, was one of a Dutch school of artists noted for the extraordinary detail they painted into their works, producing scenes, interiors and still-lives that look so real you almost feel you could reach out and touch them.

But I dare say, that in all that pursuit of excellence, there must have been times when they made a mistake, or someone walked by and jogged their elbow, or a canvas they'd been working on got smudged while it was still drying, or damaged by careless handling. It's difficult for us to imagine how traumatic this must have been for artists of this calibre, giving such meticulous attention to detail.

What would they have done by way of response? Would they have thrown out the whole canvas and started again? I doubt it – having invested so heavily in what they'd already achieved, in preparation, time and materials, I imagine that they'd try to repair the damage and save the bigger picture. And if we think about this in relation to God's works of art, you and me, then I suspect he feels much the same.

Some folk hear the parable of the 'Weeds among Wheat', sometimes known as the 'Parable of the Wheat and Tares', and make rather a strict interpretation of what it means. They imagine that, at the end of the age, on the day of judgement, Jesus intends to throw all the people who've done anything bad into the fires and furnaces of hell, where they will writhe and weep in terrible pain for the rest of their days. If this is true then I'm for it too, because I've done things in my life that I'm not proud of.

But let's face it, this vindictive God doesn't really conform with the idea of a loving, forgiving, ever-merciful God who really cares about

all his children. If we step back from the specifics of the text and bear in mind the spirit of what Jesus says elsewhere, such as 'suffer not the little children' (Mt.19:14) or of 'forgiving seventy-seven times' (Mt.18:21), then we can see that he speaks not so much about people being divided into the good and bad, but about what we should do with our badness as it arises within each of us.

In much the same way as the artist would like to preserve all that is right about his ruined picture as he struggles to make amends, so I think God wants to put right and heal all that has gone wrong in you and me – that this is his equally meticulous work. And this is why he sent his Son, to offer us the opportunity not just to condemn ourselves to eternal damnation, but to show us how to amend our ways, to thereby live a fuller life, and to pass on God's love to those around us.

Unfortunately, some people have either been so damaged by their life's experience they may appear beyond redemption, or we imagine them born evil, with no good reason for their behaviour. The priest David Adam tells a story of twins attending a school who caused such a ruckus that all kinds of help was drafted in to try to help, from extra tuition to child psychologists – all to no avail. In the end, they discovered that it was just one of the twins who was at the root of the problem, and the only solution was to quite literally uproot him like a harmful weed – to exclude him from the school. And after this happened, peace and tranquillity prevailed.

Now call me naïve but I like to think that, even in a situation like this, God doesn't give up on someone like the bad twin. That, despite the fact that he'd made his own journey much more difficult, God would still always be looking for ways to bring him to fruition, and be very sad if he remained unfulfilled. So my message is, before we allow ourselves to be too judgemental of others, remember that Jesus talked of allowing the wheat and the weeds to grow together, that we may think about the proportion of wheat and weeds in our own lives, and to consider how this impacts on us and on others. To have in mind saving the parts of the bigger picture for which we are truly responsible, and which no-one else can do anything about but us. Amen.

Who, me? The call of Isaiah – A Talk for the Sunday School

1. Hands up who has dreams when they are asleep? Do you remember your dreams when you wake up in the morning? Are all your dreams nice ones, or do you sometimes have bad dreams?
2. Now, hands up who has daydreams? You know what I mean – your mum or dad or teacher speaks to you and you don't hear because you are busy thinking or dreaming about something else.
3. Some people believe in another type of dream, called a vision. Visions are very different, because they seem to come from outside a person, not from inside their head like day or night dreams. It's as though they are looking at a picture of something that has happened or is going to happen. Quite a few people in the Bible had visions. Today we heard about somebody in the Bible who had a vision that changed his life. This man was called Isaiah and he has a book in the Bible written about the things he said and did.
4. But let's begin at the beginning. Isaiah was a Jew and we think he lived in Jerusalem about 2,700 years ago – long before Jesus was born. We don't know a lot about his life, but we do know that he was married, with at least two children, and that he was a man with influence, who sometimes gave advice to the king of Israel about what he should do.
5. Isaiah was a religious man and he used to go regularly to the huge and beautiful Temple in Jerusalem to worship God. One day, Isaiah went as usual to the Temple and something extraordinary happened to him. Let's hear it in his own words (*read Isaiah 6.1–8*).
6. Isaiah had a vision that showed him how great and powerful God is and he became very frightened. He also realized how many wrong things he had done in his life, but knew that God had forgiven him. That would have been special enough, but there was something else.

Q: Can anyone remember what God said at the end and what Isaiah answered? A: "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?" and Isaiah answered, "I will go! Send me!"

7. God asked who would be his messenger and Isaiah said that he would go. God wanted someone who would listen to him and tell his people what they were doing wrong and what they should do about it. He wanted someone who would give people God's message. We call a person like that a prophet.
8. In his vision, Isaiah heard God calling him to be a prophet – God's messenger – and even though he didn't think he was good enough, he said 'yes' to God. For many years, Isaiah went on telling the people how God wanted them to live and warning them what would happen if they didn't change their wrong behaviour. His sayings were collected in a book named after him and that book is now part of the Bible.
9. That was all a very long time ago. What can we learn from the story of Isaiah that will help us in our own lives? I think we can learn at least two things. The first is that Christians, Jewish people and others believe that God can use all sorts of people to do his work, even people who don't think they are good enough. Isaiah didn't think he was good enough, but nearly 3,000 years later, people are still reading what Isaiah said about God. The second thing we can learn is that when we are asked to do something hard, like Isaiah was, if we say 'yes' and really do our best we can often do much more than we thought we could.

Reflection: Think about the things people ask you to do – your parents, your teacher, your friends. Do you say 'yes' like Isaiah and do your best to help them?

Prayer: Thank you that you love us and listen to us, even though we sometimes do wrong things. Help us to listen to you and to other people and to say 'yes' when we are asked to help. Amen.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

24 He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 27 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?" 28 He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" 29 But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 30 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." '

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

36 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.' 37 He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38 the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, 42 and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

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Romans 8.12-25

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Isaiah 44.6-8

6 Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. 7 Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. 8 Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

Isaiah 44:6-8

6

The Lord, who rules and protects Israel, the Lord Almighty, has this to say: "I am the first, the last, the only God; there is no other god but me.

7

Could anyone else have done what I did? Who could have predicted all that would happen from the very beginning to the end of time?[a]

8

Do not be afraid, my people! You know that from ancient times until now I have predicted all that would happen, and you are my witnesses. Is there any other god? Is there some powerful god I never heard of?"

Isaiah 6:1-8

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on his throne, high and exalted, and his robe filled the whole Temple. **2** Around him flaming creatures were standing, each of which had six wings. Each creature covered its face with two wings, and its body with two, and used the other two for flying. **3** They were calling out to each other:

"Holy, holy, holy! The Lord Almighty is holy! His glory fills the world."

4 The sound of their voices made the foundation of the Temple shake, and the Temple itself became filled with smoke.

5 I said, "There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among a people whose every word is sinful. And yet, with my own eyes I have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

6 Then one of the creatures flew down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. **7** He touched my lips with the burning coal and said "This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven."

8 Then I heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?"

I answered, "I will go! Send me!"