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Last Sunday, we heard the Parable of the Sower. It told us about the different kinds of soil into which the seed was sown - and the different results. This morning Jesus offers us another parable about sowing and reaping. It used to be called the Wheat and the Tares - now more commonly The Wheat and the Weeds.

Not surprisingly, the disciples ask Jesus to explain his parable - because there are aspects of it which would have surprised them as I think also surprise us.

The sower sows and the wheat comes up. But what also comes up is a crop of weeds. 'Where did these come from?' they ask. And the sower says simply 'An enemy has done this' And the obvious thing is to get going with the weeding - but the sower says 'No' because they might uproot the wheat as well. 'Let both grow together until the harvest - collect the weeds first and bind them for burning - and then gather the harvest of wheat.

The sower isn't shy about saying what has happened - nor is Jesus when he says 'the enemy who sowed them is the devil'

And in his explanation Jesus is not shy about naming the evil of this. The weeds - representing all causes of sin and evil doers - are to be gathered up at the end of the age - at the last Judgement. And then they are to be burned. Meanwhile the good seed - the children of God's Kingdom will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

I think what is interesting about this is how Jesus absolutely clearly names the difference between good and evil. Churches and church leaders are often criticised for being reluctant to do that -

But there is a surprise as well. Jesus names the evil for what it is - but then says they should let both wheat and weeds grow together until the

harvest - then and only then are they to bind up the weeds and burn them.

We live in an age where people want to see things in very black and white terms - people are very adversarial - demanding quick and simple - black and white - answers to complex problems.

There can be a lot of conflict in the church too. I remember just before I became a bishop going to a training session on conflict in churches. They rated conflicts from 1 to 5 - 5 being the most severe. The suggestion was that much conflict in the church escalates quite rapidly to level 4 or 5. Why? Are we really that bad? Because we don't have endless Customer Services departments sending out bland replies to your letter of complaint. Conflict can't be diffused until people get tired. And while many of the things we argue about may seem quite petty - they are actually connected to things which are of the utmost importance in our lives.

Jesus' parable and his explanation aren't soft. He doesn't say, 'Don't worry about the weeds' He is absolutely clear about the evil one - the devil - who has sown them. But he is also aware that a zealous attempt to root out the weeds may well destroy the crop of wheat.

So there is unswerving moral certainty and clarity - but there is also a plea for them to wait for the right time to deal with the evil in front of them - to wait until the final judgement.

I have to admit that I find this quite difficult - as the disciples probably did also. We live in very adversarial - often angry - times. One of the things which I think we should take away from Jesus' parable is that we should concentrate more on what happens with the good seed - on the crop of wheat. We should think more about what can be done to make our society better and spend less energy on trying to root out all evil where we see it.

And in the church we should be prepared to deal openly with our differences - and not allow difference to become division - which is of course what has happened in the history of the church Holding things

together requires brave leadership and patience - and as with the wheat and the weeds - clarity about the difference between good and evil.

Meanwhile we should let both - both good and bad - grow together until the harvest. Then comes the final judgement when the weeds are taken away and burned - and, as Jesus says, 'the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.