

Sermon 10 November 2024 Judging Others

Romans 2:1-4 Matthew 13:24-30

I quote from our gospel reading: *'The kingdom 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.'* The weeds referred to are actually darnel, and in some versions the word *darnel* is used rather than *weeds*. This is quite important because the darnel is very similar in appearance to wheat and it is only when the wars appear that the difference becomes noticeable. By then the roots are so closely entwined that it is virtually impossible to pull out the darnel without damaging the roots of the wheat. So it is after harvesting that the darnel is sorted from the wheat, as the farmer directed in the parable.

Before we move on to explain why this similarity is important, let's just quickly refer to the enemy who has planted the darnel amongst the farmer's wheat. This, if not a common practice, was sometimes done. This enemy reminds us that unfortunately there do exist in the world evil forces/people who, for whatever reasons, want to derail all the good that is being done by so many. The good news is that despite our preoccupation and focus on the bad and the negative, there is a huge amount of positive stuff happening everywhere every day. If there wasn't, we would have self-destructed a long time ago. So, bottom line, evil exists and we have to be on the lookout for it and do what we can to combat it.

So, back to why this similarity between darnel and wheat is important. It teaches us that it can be difficult to distinguish between what is genuinely good and what is genuinely bad. And all too often, we form an opinion before we know all the facts and before we really know a person. We are much too quick to pigeon-hole or judge someone before really knowing them or their situation.

There is the story of a new recruit who went into training, hoping to be a marine. He was one of those young men who seem to be a bit out of step with the norm, and he easily became the subject of ridicule for those who enjoy singling out off-beat people. In the particular barracks to which this young marine was assigned, there was a high level of meanness. The other young men did everything they could to make a joke of the new recruit. One day, someone came up with the bright idea that they could scare the living daylights out of this young marine by dropping a disarmed grenade on to the floor and pretending that it was about to go off. Everyone knew about this and they were all ready to get a big laugh.

The hand grenade was thrown into the middle of the floor and the warning was yelled, 'It's a live grenade, it's a live grenade!' They fully expected that the young man would get hysterical and perhaps jump out of the window, and they could all have a good laugh. Instead, the young marine fell on the grenade, hugged it to his stomach and yelled, 'Run for your lives. Run for your lives!'

The other marines froze in stillness and shame. They had totally misread this guy. To say that they looked idiots would be an understatement.

There are a couple of points to be made here. Firstly, as we have already alluded to, it is dangerous to judge on appearances. It is dangerous to judge on perceptions. All too often there are things happening in a person's life of which we have no knowledge and which would bring a very different perspective to our view of them. If we rush into judgment, we will invariably get it wrong.

Secondly, before we judge, we need to take a close look at ourselves. We are all very human, which means we have our faults and we make mistakes. As Jesus said, *'Why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?'* Matthew 7:3.

In our first reading, Paul says, *'Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.'* Romans 2:1. I really do believe it is one of the most common failings we are guilty of. I would be the first to put up my hand and plead guilty. It is such a human thing to do, but ironically, it actually says more about ourselves than the person we are passing judgment on. American author and motivational speaker, Wayne Dwyer, wrote, *'Judging a person does not define who they are. It defines who you are.'* Now that is insightful.

It is very important that we acknowledge that as members of a church community, no matter how faithfully we attend church every week, we are not immune to human failings. In fact, that acknowledgment should be a very important part of just who we are, and a very good reason why we come to church. Henry Ward Beecher, American Congregationalist and social reformer, said, *'The Church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones.'* We are all imperfect, that's for sure, and so, as Paul points out, we have no excuse for pointing the finger at anyone else.

Speaking of weeds, there's the story of a religious studies teacher who said to his class, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could weed out the Church? Wouldn't it be great if we could weed out those who are not fully committed to God because of the things they do that are contrary to God's will? Just think of the impact the Church would have on the world.'

A girl in the back of the class put up her hand and said, 'I absolutely agree but who would decide who's to be weeded out and who's to stay?' A boy raised his hand and said, 'I think almost anyone could decide that. I can give you a list of names right now!'

I would say to that boy, there's only one person who decides; there is only one person who judges and that is God. I do get a little annoyed when I hear people say, 'If you do this, or do that, you will go to hell.' That's God's decision, not ours. *'For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.'* 2 Corinthians 5:10. James, in his usual forthright way, writes, *'God alone is the judge. He alone has the power to save or destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbour?'* James 4:12. Rather than passing judgment on others, we should be doing everything in our earthly power to ensure that we receive a warm welcome when we come to face with God.