

THE WEEDS AND THE SEED

We had a great discussion on this passage at our Bible study on Wednesday night. But I was struck by how hard it is to get our heads around the concept of an enemy. And how difficult it is to understand evil and the question: “is evil even a significant problem for us here in Australia”?

A little different to the situation in a country, a friend of mine highlighted in a recent newsletter:

I write this, my hands are shaking from adrenaline rushing through my veins. Something just exploded around the backstreets of our house. The ground shook like an earthquake as the shockwave snapped through our bodies, followed by constant crackling gunfire. Some shots are somewhere in the distance, and some seem right near us.

What a time to sit down and write our update letter, eh!

But that's the reality of this gut-wrenching war. It flares up every day, at any random time, and it just seems like it will never end.

Obviously, my friend lives and serves in a dangerous place – the enemy always close, the threat of the enemy’s evil bullets, weeds that are ensnaring, entangling, and overwhelming a whole nation.

Jesus, here in Matthew 13, shares with the people a parable about an enemy and how that enemy is very sneaky – “while everyone was sleeping”, Jesus explains, in verse 25, the enemy sows weeds in a wheat field.

The weeds we learn later, in verse 41, are “everything that causes sin and all who do evil”.

“Everything that causes sin and all who do evil” – that seems to me, a very significant concern, no matter where we live.

“**Stolen Focus**” is a secular book that’s been in the press and mentioned on news and current affairs programs lately. In short, the author is suggesting:

All over the world, our ability to pay attention is collapsing. In the US, college students now focus on one task for only 65 seconds, and office workers on average manage only three minutes....

We think our inability to focus is a personal failing – a flaw in each one of us. It's not. This has been done to us – by powerful external forces. Our focus has been stolen.

“This has been done to us – by powerful external forces”

Ironic! Especially as we consider the message of Jesus parable.

What is, however, real, and true for the vast majority of all of us, devices of some description are almost constantly, in our hands. For at least 60% of us, that means, at least four hours per day and for those under the age of 25, it sadly also means, most likely 1 in 3 (maybe more), have experienced some form of bullying, when using one of those devices.

Devices that at their very best, provide; community, fellowship, 24/7 communication. Devices that bring joy, laughter, encouragement, and connectedness to the lonely and isolated.

But at their worst devices that provide; distraction, addiction, misdirection, lies, feed mental illness and have as their foundation algorithms that fuel greed and gluttonous levels of indulgence.

But it's not just devices, that distract us; crammed schedules, family, sport, goals to achieve, careers to foster, homes to buy, places to see and decisions to make in the minutia of every day – impatience, selfishness, a raised voice, lack of prayerfulness, a loose word and gossip so easily lead us little by little, and every so subtly away from God and along a path towards sin.

A sneaky and very clever enemy Jesus tells us, a powerful enemy who has the potential to undermine and steal our righteousness.

So how do we to live with, alongside and endure the discomfort of this enemy?

1. We need to engage and not retreat

In verse 24 Jesus begins telling, another parable.

Read 13:24-26

Jesus', parable unfortunately, doesn't answer where the enemy comes from, or why the enemy comes.

But Jesus does confirm:

- There is an enemy.
- And that enemy plants “weeds”.
- And those “weeds” will live and grow together with the good seed.

If it was me, I’d want to get rid of the “weeds”, because I like everything to be perfect and weeds look untidy and unappealing. But you know what sometimes when I’m gardening, because I’m impatient and take short cuts, I do pull out some of the good plants, when I’m trying to get rid of the weeds.

But not the owner of the field in the parable. This owner cares deeply about every good seed, and even though he’s aware, an enemy has tried to trash his crop with weeds, he answers his servants when they ask, about pulling out the weeds:

Read 13:29- 30

Jesus is basically saying, expect sin to be present in the world. For now, you’ll have to live with the discomfort, because in this present age, there’s no plan to destroy or remove the potential harm of sin and evil from the world.

You’ll have to wait, be patient, remain steadfast till the harvest. I don’t want to risk losing one precious person. So, as difficult as it might seem, I assure you that you can and will grow to be a beautiful kernel of wheat.

We might say, as challenging as it might be sometimes, to be a Christian in our world, hang in there and be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Grow in love, trustworthiness, honesty, kindness, gentleness, and peace.

And don’t be afraid if you’re good seed, the enemy can’t uproot you. But be watchful because the enemy is all around you and ready to deceive you.

How do we to live alongside and endure the discomfort of the enemy?

We need to engage and not retreat.

But we can also live with the knowledge that the kingdom of heaven is growing, even when evil and sin seem overwhelming.

God is at work and from a little seed a big kingdom grows.

Read 13:31-32

It's a metaphor the crowds would have recognised, a metaphor consistent with those of the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel and yet also an image that would not have been recognised.

A metaphor, of a kingdom that would begin insignificantly, with a carpenter from Nazareth, a few uninspiring fishermen, and a tax collector. A very small unimpressive seed scattered and planted, that would become a massive tree with branches and a canopy spreading over all the nations of the world, a tree with roots full of power, but a tree offering shelter, peace, and restoration to all nations and peoples.

But also: steady the kingdom goes towards substance and significance.

Read 13:33

Bread was the staple food of the time, made from wheat or barley flour. The bread was leavened using yeast. This means the yeast not only gave rise to the bread creating a more open and airy texture, but it also added strength to the dough. It's the yeast, and the fermentation it prompts, that provides an incredibly vivid metaphor for change and transformation.

12 years ago, St Marks at Northbridge had two small morning congregations, no youth group, barely enough children for kid's church and not enough people to play music.

Today from that small and faithful seed and the yeast that was present that has been mixed and kneaded into a new dough. Not only has there been growth in numbers of people but transformation and growth in the people.

What a vibrant, healthy, and loving church family we have, an enthusiastic, flourishing and deeply encouraging youth group, a wonderful and growing children's ministry and too many ways to mention that our church family are serving each other, our community, our nation and even the world.

So how do we to live alongside and endure the discomfort of the enemy?

- We need to engage and not retreat
- We need live with the knowledge that the kingdom of heaven is growing, even when sin and evil seems overwhelming.

And we need to live with the end, the harvest, in mind.

Jesus, in verses 36-43, asked by his disciples, explains the meaning of the parable of the wheat and weeds.

Significantly, he confirms; the “harvest”, is the end of the age, when Jesus, the “Son of Man” returns.

A time of judgement.

And it’s Jesus who’ll be the Judge, the one overseeing the harvest and the harvesters.

Read 13:40-43

It’s easy to be confused with wheat and weeds, kindness and cruelty, mercy and violence, justice, and injustice, when we share the world with an enemy, who’s clever and deceptive.

But at the end of the age, when Jesus returns and the weeding out, that he talks about here in **verse 41**, occurs, when the old passes away and the new arrives, justice will finally find it’s perfect and full expression. Why, because perfect justice is part of God’s character, and what’s so unique and wonderful about the kingdom of heaven, is the presence of God and the joy of embracing everything he is.

As Jesus graciously warns us, here in this parable, being outside the kingdom of heaven is a place for those who “cause sin and who are evildoers”, a place where there’s no justice. A place where there’ll be, “Weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

I have no idea, literally what that will be like, but it sounds horrible. A place of deep remorse, anguish, and regret - the worse place we could possibly imagine because there is nothing good there.

But Jesus doesn’t finish his explanation at verse 42, He adds:

Read verse 43

For the wheat, the good seed, those who belong to Jesus, the people of the kingdom, they will be in that unique and wonderful place of life, embracing and receiving all that is good from God, living with God, perfectly sustained, and restored by God, perfectly transformed into the image of Christ – A place of light, and radiating sunshine.

So how do we to live alongside and endure the discomfort of the enemy?

- We need to engage and not retreat
- We need to live with the knowledge that the kingdom of heaven is growing, even when evil seems overwhelming.

- And we need to live our lives keeping the end in mind

But what does that look like – Here’s just two things we might consider?

Over the last 12 years as an Overseer God has graciously provided a regular opportunity to review my life, through the lens of God’s word, with the accountability of my wife and some men I trust with my life.

The Bible functions, as one writer suggests, as God’s spiritual tape measure. And when we measure our lives against it, and willingly open our hearts to it, we appreciate that the enemy is not just in the world around us, it’s also waging war within us.

The “weeds” have infiltrated us and the way to ensure they don’t overcome us, and that we, don’t ever become comfortable with the things that should grieve us, concern us, and stop us yearning to change, is confession.

It’s extremely hard to see ourselves clearly and to accept what we see. So we need to ask God for his help, to come before him humbly, to acknowledge our selfishness and our weaknesses and place our needs and our hope and assurance of forgiveness at Jesus feet and his cross.

It may lead to asking someone for forgiveness, it may mean sharing your confession with someone you trust and asking them to pray with you or asking them to check in with to help you change. There may also be consequences that we need to own but knowing that as hard as some of those consequences might be we can be confident as we lay them at Jesus feet they’ve been covered by his blood.

Confession can be difficult, even just knowing what to pray, I remember one of our church family being interviewed a few years ago and he shared what helped him was kneeling at the end of his bed each night humbly speaking to God. I find liturgical prayers helpful, so I have 7 different confessions, one for each day of the week on my PrayerMate app.

Whatever it looks like for you, creating a pattern of confession, forgiveness and reconciliation will keep the enemy at bay and the weeds from overcoming us.

As seeds of wheat, maturing people of the kingdom, we have the most precious gift possible, from a compassionate, merciful, and gracious saviour and so we can share it.

In so many places, in our community here in Northbridge, among our networks, our families, our neighbours, our work colleges and yes, the nations of the world there are seeds of wheat under attacked from weeds and seeds of wheat that are yet germinated because the weeds are concealing the sunshine and sucking the nutrients of truth out of the good soil that the seeds of wheat are planted in.

But we have the remedy, the sunshine, the fertiliser, the precious words of truth and eternal life. So would we share them, so that, whoever has ears would hear, and they too: ***would be declared righteous and shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (13:43)***