

This summer we are telling some more of the stories that Jesus told. We listened to some of Jesus' stories a couple of summers ago and over the next number of weeks we will be listening to some more.

This morning's story comes in the middle of several stories that are all telling us something about the Kingdom of God. What does it mean for us to be part of that kingdom, but equally what does it mean to be on the outside of the kingdom.

The story read for us today is about a man who sows a field full of seed which he hopes will grow into a crop of wheat. It seems in the middle of the night, while everyone was sleeping and no-one was watching, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. The workers, when they discovered this act of vandalism, they wanted to protect the good crop by pulling up the weeds – but the owner said no, wait. If we pull up the weeds now, we might lose some of the wheat, wait and we will separate it all at harvest.

Jesus, very helpfully, explains this story to us. He tells us that the field is the world and the good seed, that's the children of God, while the bad seed is the children of the evil one. The world is full of both groups of people, those who belong to Christ and those who don't and so by definition belong to the evil one. We all live together, we all navigate life beside one another, but one day, Jesus will send his angels to separate us – the children of God are collected into the barn, to safety and security, while the children of the evil one are destroyed.

When we tell the story like this it is very black and white – and in many ways this is a black and white story. When Jesus returns, he will sort everyone into these two groups, the children of God and the children of the evil one. We should not be in any doubt as to how binary this final sorting will be. We are either part of one group or the other, there will be no halfway house.

Having said that, things are a little less clear and binary as we wait for Christ's return. Notice that in the story the farmer doesn't want to pull the weeds too early. I am reliably told that the weeds Jesus would have in mind are called dandelion. Dandelion, I am told, it is incredibly hard to tell apart from wheat, it is only in the final stages when wheat produces ears that you can tell the difference. Which is why the farmer didn't want to pull them too early.

This is where things become a little fuzzier when we try to apply this story about the kingdom of God to our lives. Essentially what Jesus is telling us, is that all of us are having to make our way through life listening to and believing one of two stories.

The first story is the story of God. In the story of God, a perfect field is prepared to receive his perfect seed. It is the story of creation, the garden of Eden is prepared and into the centre of the garden God placed mankind, humanity, you and me. We were placed there to rule over the garden, to tame it, cultivate it and manage it. Crucially though, we were not given authority to do whatever we wanted in the garden. We had to manage and cultivate it according to God's rules, his framework; we had to live and work within the boundaries he set up for us.

These boundaries were not there to make God feel important, or to massage his ego. There were there because God knew this was the best way, in fact the only way, to both enjoy and manage the very thing he had created for us. This framework, the boundaries he set for us, they

were so important, that to go beyond them would mean certain death, but to remain within them guaranteed life in all of its fullness, pleasure, purpose and satisfaction.

This is the first story.

The second story is the story of the evil one, the serpent, the devil. In this story we are told that God isn't right when he says that life must be lived within his framework and boundaries. This story tells us that all God is doing is protecting his own position and actually we can have that for ourselves. If we ignore God's boundaries, then we can be like God.

We know the story of Eden; we know the story that prevailed that day was the serpents. What we also know is that God's story turned out to be the true story. Going beyond the boundaries God set for us, didn't actually make us like God, it didn't bring the satisfaction we desired, quite the opposite, for every time we take something else for ourselves we simply become more disappointed with the outcome and so yearn for more and reach for more in the hope that one day we might find that satisfaction that always seems to be just beyond us. Certainly, from that day, death became a reality for each and every one of us.

God in his mercy wasn't prepared to let the story end there and so he sent Jesus, his own Son, his own flesh and blood to be the sacrifice that would buy us back, redeem us, change our story from being one of the weeds to becoming part of the wheat crop.

This is why the farmer was so reluctant to pull up the weeds too early. He knew and understood what there was every chance that what looked like a weed today, by harvest it could actually have developed into wheat. Although we may look like weeds today, we may look like people who have bought into that second story of the evil one, there is every chance that we will yet become part of God's story again by accepting Jesus.

Two stories being told into a very confused and blurred world, to coin a modern phrase, a very nonbinary world, a world where it is very hard to tell who will eventually end up in the kingdom of God and who will remain in the kingdom of the evil one. But they are also two stories that will finish with this incredibly binary and black and white ending. We will be sorted into one or the other and we should be in no doubt about that.

So, what does this mean for us? What do we do with these stories, where do we fit into them?

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day when the spirit came in power and enabled people from across the region to hear the word of God in their own languages. As I thought and prepared for today, I had a very real sense that God was saying that this story is for two groups of people, or maybe even just two people, two individuals.

The first group, or maybe individual: you have heard these stories since you were a child. You have grown up with them, but for whatever reason you have chosen, and it has been a choice, to listen to the second story. You do not believe there are any limitations on your life, there are no boundaries, and you certainly don't believe that one day Jesus will return to judge, there will be no sorting into wheat or weeds. You don't believe any of it – so much so you have mocked not only the idea of a God who judges or who creates, or maybe even exists but you have also mocked those who believe, and some of those people have been close to you.

I believe God is saying to you that you need to stop listening to the people you have surrounded yourself with, you need to stop denying the truth of what you already know and so you need to give yourself to Jesus, you need to be part of a different story, because actually, if things

continue as they are you will only end up with the weeds – I believe God is saying there is time to change your story, but now is that time. You are to believe now, trust Jesus now, come to Jesus now.

The second group, or maybe the second individual. You are slightly different. You have created your own story, your own version of both stories. You have decided that actually you can rule in the garden, you can cultivate and shape the garden, which is your life – and you can do it according to your framework and not Gods because in your story you have decided that God will never cast you aside, he will never judge you. Others maybe, but not you.

This means your life takes the shape of someone who sits on the throne, everything is about your comfort, your satisfaction. Everything serves your needs and because you have decided that you only do what is good, so you will be allowed to continue, and God will not judge you.

God is saying to you, if you are to sit on my throne you must also be prepared to be nailed to my cross. If you are to rule in my place, then you must bear the weight that I bore for you. That throne might be comfortable now, but you are mistaken if you think God will not demand a price for you being there and so his plea is that you would give him his throne back. That you would honour him as Lord and not you. Again, now is the time to do this, before the harvesters come, because coming they are.

The Apostle Peter said this: ***The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.*** (2 Peter 3:9)

This Pentecost Sunday is the Spirit of God calling us to repent, to change, to be part of a different story? Today is the day to make that change in coming to him.

If you are one of these two people, or part of these two groups, then I also believe you need to speak to someone and not just go home to your bedroom. If you only go to your bedroom such is the way in which that second story has been told and is being continually told to you it will take hold again. You need someone to keep telling you God's story, you need to keep hearing the true story and so you will need people to walk with you and help you. So, I would encourage you to speak to someone, to me, to a family member, an elder, a trusted Christian friend – but be honest with them, allow yourself to be accountable to them.

The field hasn't yet been harvested, there is time, but not an endless amount of time... let's pray.