

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 19th July 2020

One of the great mysteries of life. The major mystery that is the mystery of evil.

If I had a pound for every time over the past forty odd years that some sincere person has asked me where evil comes from and why it exists, I would be very well off. And at such times, I have replied, for Christians, there is such a thing as a reverent agnosticism, when we say, "I don't know."

All of us have, at some point or another, read or watch the news and wonder, "How did our world get in this shape?".

The rioting on the streets of so many American communities; the bitterness of the feud in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the warfare that has torn Yemen apart; the fatal stabbings of innocent folk chatting in a park in Reading. The world seems to get crazier and crazier.

Maybe life's circumstances have left you asking yourself, "How did my life get like this?" We can all list the hurts and wounds of life, the resentments and the betrayals, the addictions, the fears, the loneliness. Like Tennyson's brook, the list goes on and on.

Perhaps you have faced the death of a loved one, a devastating diagnosis, a tragedy that shook the earth beneath your feet and want to know, "Why, if our God is good and loving, did this happen?"

There is an enormously profound parable which Jesus told which deals with the mystery of evil – He spoke of how a farmer had sown good seed in a field, then overnight, an enemy sows weeds among that good seed, a weed known as darnel, a poisonous weed that resembles wheat. By and by as the shoots appear, the servants ask, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?" Of course, he did. They know he did. That's why that they are so surprised when they discover the weeds.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

"Where, then," they ask, "did these weeds come from?"

There is an urgency to their question. They want to know what happened and who is responsible.

And so do we.

That is what we want to know when we discover weeds in our fields.

We want an explanation, someone we can blame, someone we can hold accountable, and even punish.

“An enemy has done this,” says Jesus. “Let them grow together,” He says.

That’s it. Jesus doesn’t explain it; He doesn’t identify or name the enemy. He doesn’t give instructions to find, drive out and punish this enemy.

The reality, according to our Lord, is that our lives and our world are a field in which good and evil, life and death, joys and sorrows, that which we want and that which we don’t want grow and live side by side.

The wheat and the weeds stand together in our world and in each of our lives.

And Jesus tells us that there is no technical, direct answer to the problem, and the mystery of all the terrible evil around us – poverty, drugs, violence, racism, you name it. How cruel we can all be to one another.

But the only thing Jesus does say that in the end it will be all right, but meanwhile, you and I have to make a difference where we can.

That is the only response.

So you know what that means. You and I are called to make a leap of faith.

There is no common sense way of dealing with evil. It doesn’t respond to common sense or to logic.

And at times it can be overwhelming.

But the only response to the this incredible evil is to really believe that you can make a difference and that your act of forgiveness, compassion, love, generosity, can indeed bring light into the darkness.

Our Lord wants us to get on with paying attention to planting the good seed of His Kingdom – love the folk whom He loves so much; the most vulnerable among us. Love them. Teach them. Care for them. That is where He needs us.

If you find someone who is hungry, feed them; when someone is grieving or sick, care for them; that way you will be planting seeds for His Kingdom.

If someone makes you angry or hurts you, don’t try to get even, seek to forgive them – it’s a far better way.

If you see injustice taking place in the world, speak up for those who have no voice. Leave the weeds to God. He will be the One to deal with them.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister