

MORNING SERVICE

Sunday 2 August 2009, Kilcalmonell, linked with Killean and Kilchenzie

9th Sunday after Pentecost

preacher: Rev Martin Grashoff

hymns: Church Hymnary. Fourth Edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005)

Welcome & Intimations

Opening Hymn : ‘Let us build a house’ (CH 198: 1, 2, 4, 5)

Children’s Talk

Children’s Hymn : ‘For the fruits of all creation’ (CH 231)

Prayer & Lord’s Prayer

Readings : Ezekiel 17:22-24 (*Good News Bible*) & Matthew 13:24-53 (*new translation*¹)

[Matthew 13:24-53:]

24 Another parable he puts before them, saying:
The kingdom of heaven is like a person sowing good seed in his field;
25 yet, when this person is sleeping his enemy comes
and he sows darnel all among the wheat and goes away;
26 and when the plant comes up and makes fruit,
then also the darnel appears;
27 and going to the master of the house the servants say to him,
‘Lord, did you not sow good seed in your field?
Then, from where did it get darnel?’
28 and he responds to them,
‘Some enemy did this’;
and the servants say to him,
‘Then, do you want us to go out and collect them?’
29 and he responds,
‘No – lest, while collecting the darnel,
you would pull out the wheat together with it;
30 you must allow both to grow together until the harvest,
and at the time of the harvest I will say to the harvesters,
“First you must collect the darnel and bind it in bundles to be burned,
but the wheat you must gather in my barn.”’



¹ A colometric-concordant translation. See: F.H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse theologie. I,1 Schrift-lezing*. Een verhandeling over de kolometrische weergave van bijbelse teksten als hulp bij het lezen en als grondslag voor de exegese (Kampen: Kok, 1980) – probably a good reason to learn Dutch. Some information about colometry, as distinguished from stichometry, in classical texts was already in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Edition (1910 pass.), now on [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colometry). More can be found in: Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts Of The Greek Bible. An Introduction to Greek Palæography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), which is on [Google Books](https://books.google.com/books) now.

- 31 Another parable he puts before them, saying:
The kingdom of heaven is like to a mustard grain
that someone sowed in his field;
- 32 although it is smaller than all the seeds,
when fully grown it is larger than all vegetables and becomes a tree,
so that all *the birds of the heaven camp in its branches.* [= Ps. 103:12; cf.
Ezek. 17:23; Dan.
4:12]
- ❖
- 33 Another parable he tells them:
The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven
that a woman has taken and conceals in three measures of flour
until all of it is leavened.
- ❖
- 34 All these things Jesus says in parables to the crowds
and without parables he says nothing to them,
in order to complete what was said by the prophet, with the words:
I will open my mouth [= Ps. 78:2]
and I will utter² what was hidden since the foundation [of the world].
- 36 Then, having sent the crowd away, Jesus goes into the house
and his followers come to him, saying,
‘Explain to us the parable of the darnel in the field’;
- 37 and he answers them, saying,
‘The one sowing the good seed is the son of man,
and the field is the world,
and the good seed: these are the sons of the kingdom,
and the darnel: they are the sons of the evil one,
and the enemy who sowed them is the slanderer,
and the harvest is the close of time,
and the harvesters are messengers;
just as the darnel is collected and burned with fire,
so it will be at the close of time:
the son of man will send his messengers,
and they will collect out of his kingdom all stumbling-blocks
and those who do lawlessness,
and *he will throw them into the furnace of fire* – [= Dan. 3:6]
in that place will be weeping and gnashing of teeth –
then the righteous will be radiant as the sun
in the kingdom of their father. [cf. Judg. 5:31;
2 Sam. 23:3f;
Dan. 12:3]
- Anyone who has ears, should hear!’
- ❖
- 44 The kingdom of heaven is like to a treasure hidden in the field,
which someone, on finding it, hides,
and in his joy he goes away and sells all he has and buys that field. [cf. Prov. 2:4]
- ❖
- 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a travelling merchant
searching fine pearls;

² Literally: spit out.

- 46 and, having found one pearl of great value,
he goes away and sells off all he has and buys it.
- ❖
- 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a dragnet thrown into the sea
and it gathers fish of every kind; [cf. Hab. 1:14f]
- 48 which, when it is completely filled, is dragged upon the beach,
and, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets,
but the rotten ones they throw out.
- ❖
- 49 This is how it will be at the close of time:
the messengers will go forth and separate the evil ones [cf. Ps. 1:5]
out of the midst of the righteous ones;
- 50 and *he will throw them into the furnace of fire* – [= Dan. 3:6]
in that place will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- ❖
- 51 Do you understand all this?
They say to him, ‘Yes.’
- 52 And he says to them,
‘Therefore, every scribe
who has become a follower of the kingdom of heaven
is like to a master of the house,
who throws out of his treasure new and old.’
- ❖
- 53 *And it happens, when Jesus ends these parables,
that he departs from there.*
- ❖❖

Hymn : ‘The great love of God’ (CH 358)

Sermon

The end of time... We will all be aware of a long and pretty regular flow of predictions about this. Last a week the latest came from a former MI5 officer, who now is convinced to be the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Just for your information: our world will end on December 23rd 2012.³ No Christmas that year...

Personally I prefer it if people add a bit of humour to their references to the end of time. Like Meat Loaf did some years ago:⁴

I swore I would love you ‘till the end of time –

So now I’m praying for the end of time

To hurry up and arrive

‘Cause if I gotta spend another minute with you

I don’t think that I can really survive...

³ David Shayler, who obviously inherited a troubled past from his MI5 whistleblowing in 1997, interviewed in [The Independent](#).

⁴ In the song ‘Paradise by the Dashboard Light’, from the album *Bat Out Of Hell* (1977).

Both talk and talkers about the end of time most often are troubled, to put it mildly. Still end of time expectations can give us an uncanny feeling. But the parables from Jesus as we heard them today, might restore a better balance between fear and fun.

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First, let us return to the question of the disciples we heard last week. Why does Jesus speak in parables?

He says it is because those who gather around him, *seeing do not see and hearing do not hear*.⁵ Jesus does not tell parables to keep them in that clasp of ignorance, but rather the opposite. Through parables they can learn to see and hear differently and by that discover and understand the kingdom of God as a reality among and within themselves. Parables are exercises in seeing and hearing differently, leading to new understanding.

Jesus really wants all people to understand about the kingdom of God and that is why he cannot stop telling parables. Today we heard as much as six of them. And Matthew explains that Jesus does this to reveal *what was hidden since the foundation of the world*. Once he has finished telling his parables, he asks his followers, *Do you understand all this?* Understanding the kingdom, that is the question.

But...! Parables do not go down just like that. They need to be explained. Even the closest circle of followers, the twelve disciples who are said *to know the mysteries of the kingdom*,⁶ need explanation. Last week we heard Jesus explaining the parable of the sower, today he explains the parable of the darnel. And actually, Jesus expects his followers to add their own explanations and interpretations of the other parables. Perhaps he even hopes that in due time they will find new parables to reflect the kingdom of God in new circumstances?

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So, what about this Parable of the Darnel? Traditionally it is known as the Parable of the Tares, and it also appears in the gnostic Gospel of Thomas,⁷ in a shorter version.

The darnel is probably the plant which is still known in the Middle East as ‘false wheat’.⁸ It looks very much like wheat, but actually it is often poisonous, making people very ill. Darnel is very much *likened unto* wheat, but in a really bad way. It is a deceitful

⁵ Matthew 13:13.

⁶ Matthew 13:11.

⁷ Thomas 57; an English translation can be found [on-line](#).

⁸ [Lolium temulentum](#), or darnel, or cockle, is a yearly plant from the same family as ordinary ryegrass (which is the major cause of hay fever). Darnel looks very similar to wheat and only once the plants have fully grown and are ready to be harvested, the difference becomes visible. The seeds of darnel can make people very ill, although usually not leading to death. The cause is probably a fungus that lives symbiotically with the plant and possibly produces the poisonous substance temulin (from Latin *temulentus*, ‘drunk’ – the symptoms of poisoning with darnel initially look like drunken behaviour, but can eventually end in convulsions). Darnel used to be quite common in Europe not so long ago.

plant. By telling this parable Jesus adds a new dimension to our understanding of God's kingdom.

Within the five discourses of Jesus, as Matthew has composed them, this third one with the Parables of the Kingdom, is the most central. This reveals the very heart of Jesus' teachings: it is about God present and working among and within each of us. *If we dare to see and hear!*

These parables link directly backwards to the Sermon on the Mount:

*Happy the poor with Spirit,
because theirs is the kingdom of heaven...⁹*

Parables of the kingdom reveal the blessing of the Beatitudes, with which Jesus commences his teaching. For those who really hear and see, that blessing is there in real life, despite all injustice, peace-breaking, or slavery.

But the parables also link directly forward to the last of the five discourses, the so-called Eschatological Discourse. That is the kind of gospel we rather skip, because it is about the end of time and horrible apocalyptic events. (We will read that later in the year.)

At the moment that Jesus is recalling the blessing he started with, he also mentions this *end of time*. Clearly original blessing and the end of time belong together. In this world we cannot live on cloud nine, nor can we observe things through pink glasses. The question is: What is that 'end of time' about?

It is about the point in time when things are decided and there is no longer a way back or a way out. It is the moment of ultimate decision, when truth is revealed, when all pieces of our broken lives fall in place again, when all deceit and wrong-doing and failure are cast out. In Greek that is: the *kairos*. That moment can come any time of our life, and it can come back again. It is far too narrow to see it as one particular date in history. It is not a date on which total destruction will be there, and we should be scared like hell. The end of time is when all things are finally sorted out and the goodness of creation wins, and we may want to live to see that happen.

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Jesus' teaching is about the unbelievable truth that God is already here and that this world and its inhabitants are already part of God's kingdom. The blessing from creation is already working out and we are passionately called to learn to see and hear it.

But Jesus is also very realistic. He is not sitting on cloud nine, but keeps both feet down to earth. Finally the break-through of God's kingdom will end things as they usually go, and that may hurt. But there is no other way to sever good from evil.

If we focus on the coming endings only, we will become dour and gloomy like Private

⁹ Matthew 5:3.

Frazer, or despair-stricken like certain eco-prophets. We will only see things ending in apocalyptic colours. If we focus on the end only, all we can see is disaster and destruction, with no hope whatsoever.

If we only want to see the beauty of the earth and the good in everyone, we will become lethally naive. Then we will avoid making any judgements and therefore we will miss to see the difference between good and evil. Actually, while we do not want to see the wickedness among and within us, we give it plenty space to grow rampant.

Jesus wants us to see and hear what the world is really like in order to live by the blessing and goodness God gives. But along with the good wheat the wicked darnel will grow. There is no way to balance that nicely. But when the time is right, we need to sort it out, so that the wheat can be harvested and made into good bread. Actually, we do not need to sort it out – it will *be* sorted out *for* us. Jesus is not asking us to find a nice and smooth balance, but to be prepared to choose when the time is right.

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This may all sound not as nice as we would like. It would be much nicer to be told where and how exactly we could find that kingdom of God. That would ‘prove’ to us that it is real.

Actually I think that Jesus is much wiser. He knows that there cannot be any hope without both dreams and visions, as well as honest realism. Hope makes us believe that our dreams and visions will work out, some time and somehow. But it also makes us resistant against everything that seems to deny or destroy the goodness and beauty on earth. Provided, we are honest and daring enough to see and hear evil when it’s there.

To count our blessings, to explain parables and perhaps tell new ones, to be aware of evil without despairing – that is how we can live in the reality of God’s kingdom. It comes down to listening and watching well enough to distinguish good from evil. But it is the good and the blessing that we should look for and nourish. That’s how we can live the parables of Jesus.

Amen.

Hymn : ‘The reign of God’ (CH 343)

Offering brought forward

Prayer of Intercession

Closing Hymn : ‘Lord of all hopefulness’ (CH 166)

Blessing