

Order of Joint Service Currie Kirk with Balerno Parish Church

Worship in Lockdown—26 July 2020

Good morning and welcome to our worship wherever you may be joining us from, whether that be Balerno, Currie or somewhere in Edinburgh, Scotland or further afield. I am Grant Gordon, an elder in Currie Kirk and in our on-line Service I am joined by Bill Black of Balerno Church who reads the Scriptures. While our worship focuses on one of Jesus' parables, let us first come together in our Call to Worship.

Call to Worship—Words from Psalm 8

LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory in the heavens. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

Hymn—How Great Thou Art (Words on separate sheet)

Opening Prayer

Loving and living God, we thank you that you created this world in all its beauty, the sunsets and sunrises, the sound of water bubbling over rocks in the river, the rhythm of waves lapping over beach sand, the stars twinkling in the night sky.

For cradling and cherishing us we thank you; for nurturing and sustaining us we thank you; for guiding and challenging us we thank you; for your presence throughout our entire life's journey we thank you.

Loving and living God, we thank you for every gracious human relationship, the enrichment of family ties, the creative growth of friendship. We thank you for all that leads us beyond this present moment as we bump into you face to face; we thank you for the gift of prayer, to speak to you, to listen to you, asking of you.

And as you bless us in the ecstasies of life, so draw near to us, when we face our failures as well. Father, forgive us for living selfishly as if no-one mattered but ourselves, for living carelessly as if we belonged only to ourselves, for acting too quickly and thinking too late, for words unkind, for words unwise, for cowardly or discourteous silence and for being ever ready with our sharp criticism. This is who we are and we are grateful for who you are. Father in such a moment of self-awareness of regret, or wistful longing, we thank you for all that life is understood and transformed in your presence and power through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master. Amen.

The Scripture readings are from Psalm 139 v 1—12 & 23—24 and Matthew 13: 24—30 & 36—43

read by Bill Black (Words on separate sheet)

Meditation

WHEAT OR WEEDS?

Let us Pray: Breathe on us, O God, that we may be filled with your Spirit and led by your living word. Bless the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts. We ask this in your name. Amen.

The Psalmist says “Where could I go to escape from you? Where could I get away from your presence?” words from Psalm 139. A Psalm with a simple, but reassuring message—God is everywhere. God is everywhere. There is no place you or I can go that God is not there and has not been there, waiting for us to arrive. Remember Jonah? He tried to flee the presence of the Lord. The Lord says “Jonah, You can run, but you can’t hide.” It does not matter where we run to, how fast we run to get there, if we go under the cover of darkness, how many twists and turns we make, how we cover our tracks, it doesn’t matter, God is always there with us.

God is here with us today. He will be with you at your job, at the lunch table, on the golf course, in the garden, at the supermarket, out in the fields, when you’re happy, sad, at all times, and in all situations. God is everywhere and He has promised to be with us always.

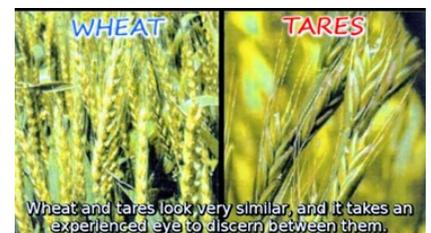
But how can that be when we cannot but be aware of the weeds that choke our world, our society, insidiously, treacherously, often silently, by default? Just watching the news is enough to feel that the bindweed has choked the clear bright message of Christ, to love our neighbour, to do good to those that hate us, to forgive, to care for the vulnerable, the aged, the starving; the list is endless. Weeds aplenty.

But if this God is with us always how could the One who created the heavens and earth let bad things happen?; that is the plaintive cry echoed a thousand times over by despairing, distraught and heartbroken people. What kind of God is that? Most assuredly not the God who has promised to be with us always. The God we know is a God whose heart has been broken so many times but who reaches out to our broken and bleeding world binding its wounds, a God who reaches out to those who are sorrowful and hurting bringing comfort deep within, who reaches out to all who walk through the valley of tears bringing an assurance that those who mourn will one day find peace, a God who continually weeps over our fallenness and when we were so alienated from his presence, He took our human form and, as it were, rolled up His sleeves and got to work on the mess that we had made out of ourselves, our world and each other. Yes, a God who loves us; that same type of love as revealed in our Gospel lesson in the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

In this parable the farmer sows good seed in his field. That night, while everyone is sleeping, the enemy comes and sows poisonous weeds in the same field where the wheat seed has been sown. No one realizes it until spring comes, and the weeds rise out of the ground alongside the wheat.

Now let us turn the clock back 2,000 years and try and put ourselves in the place of the people in Jesus’ time? The people were part of an early society; primarily agricultural. Their concepts of distance and communication were entirely different from our own. As an agricultural economy, the output or crops from the farms—wheat in this parable—were critically important. The yield from the farms had a clear meaning to the people. It was the difference between starving and living; the difference between feeding themselves and their families adequately or going hungry.

While that was 2,000 years ago this parable has a very contemporary edge to it for our life, together as the Church, as a society, and also for us as individuals. Jesus says that there is good and evil. This old observation is confirmed with each morning paper or each television news bulletin. Each of us has scars in our daily lives that seem to be inflicted by others. We would probably agree that many of the people in our society live beyond and without the knowledge and the acceptance of the love of Christ. In a world that can be nurtured by the beauty and love that Christ shares, they seem to be on a different path rather than sharing and producing for the good of society.



Jesus tells this parable to help us understand the value of the wheat. The wheat is precious to the farmer. He refuses to lose any of it in order to get rid of the weeds. It's a familiar theme in the gospels:
The shepherd who leaves 99 sheep to find the one sheep that is lost;
The woman who searches the house from top to bottom to find the lost coin;
Even the gathering up of those 12 baskets of leftovers after the feeding of the 5000.

In God's economy, nothing is wasted. Nothing good is counted as expendable. While we may grow impatient with God's role in history, God is still here. In a time when the well-being of our planet and its ecology seems, once again, in jeopardy because of climate-change deniers, God is still here. In a time when many people are worried about their jobs, their finances, their children's futures, God is still here. In a time when in so many countries the cries of the people are not heard, and some might say that the soul of the body politic is corroded by cynicism, God is still here. In every season of the human journey, no matter what the circumstance, personal and private, national or global, God is still here.

Might the real meaning of the parable be that turning weeds into wheat is exactly the reason Christ came into the world because in reality wheat and tares are not separate people, but all are part of each of us. Each of us are made up of weed and wheat, good and not so good, strength and weakness, faith and doubt. God wants us to love our neighbour, to be forgiving of those with whom we disagree; to be hopeful for a new tomorrow, to be hopeful that even in diversity we can find goodness in people; to be patient in our dealings with people rather than making immediate judgments. Remember the patience shown by God in changing Moses, a murderer; in changing David, an adulterer; in changing Paul, a religious parasite; in changing Peter, a hypocrite and coward. God walked with each of these men. God loved them, God made them great, God forgave them; God granted them the blessings of His Kingdom.

So it is not for us to predict how God will judge people. It is not for us to put people into categories such as those who are saved and those who are hopelessly lost. The parable rejects any action on the part of the servants that would separate weeds from wheat.

Though we are each different as children of God, we do have hope and hope gives way to faith, and faith gives us the solid rock presence of Jesus Christ, who invites us to be faithful to him, today, tomorrow, and through eternity. Yes, God calls us to be who we are—the people of God—that's the challenge for us today. We are not merely a bunch of individual stalks of wheat in the midst of the world, but a wheat field called the Church, faithfully living out and speaking forth the mercy and grace of the One who has planted us in the midst of the world as the sons and daughters of His kingdom. We are God's people, and as Psalm 139 puts it: "You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me." We are surrounded by God's protection. "Behind and Before". All the way around, even in the worst of times, although we do not always admit it, we are covered in the sure and certain knowledge that God is with us every second, every minute, every hour, every day of our lives. So be it, Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

God of all, of all people and places, of all times and stories, the wheel of time turns slowly, but your watchful eye marks the decades with love and compassion, knowing that all will be well. And so, even with our limited vision, we open our hearts to your world and all its people, bringing our hopes and our fears, and ready to be transformed in our thoughts and our actions.

Lord, as we move through the various phases of lockdown, we pray that we would be accepting of the guidelines and not put our own selfish interpretation on what we can and cannot do. As the furloughing scheme begins to wind down we pray for those worried about their jobs, their livelihoods, others worried about business survival, others already made redundant and the stress, strain and tension all of this places on families.

Lord we pray for all who mourn the loss of a loved one, those who are depressed and anxious, those struggling with loneliness and ill health. We pray that all may feel your compassionate arms supporting and holding them.

Lord, millions of lives are at risk as Covid-19 hits refugee camps in war torn countries such as South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Fleeing families, many grieving the loss of children, all of whom struggling to find food and proper medical care are desperate for the violence to end. Please comfort them, give governments the compassion to send aid and support, to soften the hearts of those inflicting pain and end the ongoing conflict. Our fervent prayer is that the Disasters' Emergency Appeal will bring much needed relief.

And Lord we pray for your church in all its diversity. We thank you for the new opportunities that lockdown has opened up for worship and for increased numbers of people to hear the gospel message through on-line services, or other forms of social media. We pray that looking ahead the church will grasp these opportunities and through creative and imaginative thinking use technology and all its various communication channels as it ventures beyond the familiar and comfortable.

Gracious and loving God we all have people and situations that are a concern to us, in the silence we bring them before you now

Into your loving hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your abundant grace and mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Hymn—Great is Thy Faithfulness (Words on separate sheet)

BLESSING

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself; the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service; and the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, this day and evermore.

Amen.

Please check the Kirk website for Grant's Sermon: <http://www.curriekirk.org/>