

## Weeds amongst the Wheat

**Let both grow together until the harvest    Matthew 13:30**

Six weeks ago, the lanes around Breinton, as in many other places, were bordered by banks of Cow Parsley. I suppose you would call it a weed. It certainly did not help the vision of the car driver. So it was cut back. Today, what survived is now showing the seed of this plant. It is quite a pretty growth, lacy - white, and with a strong but not unpleasant smell. (Known also as "Lady's Lace") As a boy I remember collecting the seed, and because Cow Parsley seed is so like parsnip seed (Cow Parsnip is another word for it). I decided, with my school pal, to open my father's packet of parsnip seeds and fill the packet with cow parsley seeds. When the seeds began to grow, it soon became apparent that another hand had participated in the sowing of the seed. Father did not think "an enemy has done this"... I think that there the story must end.

The weed in today's parable, was probably darnel, not unlike wheat to look at. You could only really tell the difference by the fruit it did or did not produce. Our wise farmer in Jesus' story wisely decides to let both grow together until the harvest; it was difficult to tell the difference. I will concentrate today on the seed, and those who did the sowing, rather than probe the parable further to its probable and logical conclusion. Last week, we had the parable of the sower. It wasn't really about the sower, or the seed; it was about the soils, so it ought to be called "The Parable of the Soils." Today's tale is called "The Parable of the Weeds (or Tares)" It's the seeds that matter. Since lockdown, we have taken a daily walk in the fields, rather than in the park, for in the fields we meet fewer people. I have watched the crops, harvested, ground prepared and new seed sown, and watched the growth - mangles (for sheep) and barley, wheat and oats. I have observed the care with which the growing crops have been tended. No weeds visible, because of the spraying of the infant crops. ( I do wonder what the effect the spraying might have on wildlife. I don't see any skylarks or lapwings or other birds that nest in the open fields - but that is another concern). I remember an old farm worker, in my youth, who used to attend church each year for Harvest Festival. He made an exception one year, when our new Rector took his first service. His comment afterwards, and it has stuck with me "Well, he's a good seedsman". I think that Rector sowed a lot of good seed in the developing mind of this young John Simpson, and I have reaped the harvest. Jesus was right when he quoted an ancient proverb and said that he agreed with it. "One sows, and another reaps" ( John 4: 37) Unless we are extremely fortunate it is unlikely that we will ever reap a harvest from the seeds which we have actually sown.

*Others shall sing the song...  
Others shall right the wrong  
Finish what I begin,  
And all I fail of, win.  
What matter, I or they?  
#Mine or another's day,  
So the right word be said  
And life the sweeter made?  
Ring bells in unrequited steeples  
The joy of unknown peoples  
Sound trumpets far off blown  
Your triumph is my own (John Greenleaf Whittier)*

My grandfather founded a firm which operated in mid Essex: "Simpson's: Coal, Corn and Seed Merchants" Certainly Grandad was no coal miner, or farmer. He simply sold on what he himself had received.

But I wander from the weeds.... Strange how we categorise - it's from the result, not the sowing that we make the judgement. I find it hard even then to define a weed. We readily root them out from our gardens, but we sometimes have to wait to see - weed or flower?. A neighbouring parish to mine used annually to have a Wild Flower Festival in church. Weeds, that were attractively arranged proved a draw, equally as pretty as some exotic flowers flown in from elsewhere for the more traditional Flower Festival. As I reflect on the influence others have had on me because of the good seeds sown, I have to ask what harvest, what fruit I expect from the seeds that I have sown. The temptation is to be judged ourselves by how successful we have been, to look for the fruit of our labours, which is a stupid thing to do. We are not judged by the answer to the question "Have you been successful?" but by "Have you been faithful?"

You will have heard of the parable "The seed and the fruit" in which a man had an uneasy sleep, and in his dream he entered a spacious store in which the gifts of God to men and women are kept, and he addressed the angel behind the counter, saying, "I have run out of the fruits of the spirit, can you restock me? I need love, joy, peace, integrity, discipline. Without these I shall be lost." The angel replied, "I'm sorry sir, "We do not stock fruits: only seeds."

(From "The Seed and the Fruit" by Leslie Hunter, 1953)

I wonder if God had given Adam and Eve a bag of seeds instead of a forbidden fruit, the story of human kind would have been different?