

The various addresses about the Wheat & Tares a couple of weeks ago raised more talking points than any other services recently. Ann Corner & I had a good discussion about both our interpretation of that parable and also how we read and understand scripture more widely. She asked that I circulate her thoughts, which I'm happy to do, and maybe it will stimulate your thinking too. I did suggest to her that William Barclay also struggles to deal with the agricultural problem of not being able to collect the weeds before the wheat, but we agreed that parables are not allegories and one shouldn't push the details too far. Peter

Wheat, Tares and Seeds of Doubt

The lectionary reading for July 19th was the parable of the wheat and the tares, (found in Matthew 13 v 24-30 and 36-43) and as such was the focus of the weekly service sheet we received along with 'The Bulletin'. The reflection was by Rev. H. McKeating. Margaret Graham and I were somewhat dismayed to read his comments. I quote ***"Whereas the parable of the sower accurately reflects the agricultural practices of the region, the parable of the wheat and the tares not only does not do so, but appears inherently implausible"*** He goes on to say that to suggest an enemy has sown tares ***"sounds like an unlikely kind of sabotage"***. He then asks ***"Did such things really happen?"***

Matthew 13 v 30 says "Let both grow together until harvest". Rev McKeating's comment on this being ***"once more implausibility takes over. Would it really be possible to reap the weeds first and make a bonfire of them before starting on the wheat?"***

He concludes his comments on the parable by stating ***"Whoever invented this story did not know much about the practicalities of agriculture"*** thus denying it is a parable Jesus told!

I am left wondering why Rev. McKeating didn't consult some of the authorities on the agricultural practices of the day, thus finding answers to his questions.

Joel 3 v 13 and Mark 4 v 29 are 2 references as to how wheat was harvested in those days. The sickle referred to, was held in one hand and a handful of corn (in this case wheat and tares) was grasped in the other; the sickle was deftly swung and the harvester would then be able to separate the severed wheat from the tares. The tares could then be burned. However, some tares (a weed called bearded darnel) would still be entangled with the wheat and too difficult or too time consuming to separate, so these were left until threshing time. William Barclay explains what happens next. He quotes Levison, (another authority on the subject) saying ***"Women have to be hired to pick the darnel grain out of the seed which is to be milled..... As a rule the separation of the darnel from the wheat is done after threshing. By spreading the grain out on a large tray which is set before the women they are able to pick out the darnel which is similar in shape and size to wheat but slate-grey in colour"***. It needs to be noted, the tares are slightly poisonous, hence the need for separation.

As for Rev. McKeating's question asking whether such sabotage of another man's field with tares really happened, I again quote William Barclay ***"In codified Roman law this crime is mentioned and forbidden and its punishment laid down"***. You will remember Palestine was under Roman rule at the time of Jesus.

Sadly Rev. McKeating's comments on this parable may have sown seeds of doubt in some people's minds which hopefully this letter will redress.

R. Ann Corner and Margaret E. Graham - Local Preachers.