

Prayers Immanuel United Reformed Church Swindon 18th November 2018.

(The New Testament Bible Reading on which the sermon was based was Matthew 13 24-43)

The wheat and the weeds-the wheat and the weeds.

Who are the good and who are the bad?

The wheat and the weeds, the weeds and the wheat, the Brexiteers and the Remainers, Those for and against Trump, the Shia and the Sunni, the Israelis and the Palestinians, Iranians and Saudis, Syrian government and Rebels, Houthi and the Yemeni government, Rohingyas and the Myanmar government, liberals and conservatives in politics and faith communities - who are the wheat and who are the weeds?

And how can we live with this uncertainty or division or disagreement about who is the good and who is the bad and discern between them?

We pray that we can indeed live with this complexity, indeed that we can resist a tendency in our culture to see everything in black and white, wheat and weeds terms. We pray to be able to graciously know what it is like in other people's moccasins, that we can graciously understand that even extreme views on any side might be driven by insecurities, resentments, deprivations and fears.

We pray for those who are suffering the effects where wheat and weeds camps have locked horns and created death and destruction, misery and mayhem. In Syria, Yemen, Gaza, Bangladesh and Myanmar and many more flash points. We pray for the children in these places and the elderly and all particularly distraught, disconcerted, dispossessed and deeply damaged.

We pray for them, we pray for them and yet a small part of our brain and our quiet secret self might just be saying—what is the point? What is the point? We have prayed for people in such places over and over again and the clashes between rival camps goes on and on and on.

And yet how can we not pray? Because the misery we know of, hear of, suspect is happening but try hard to put out of our minds - is something that at base really does matter to us. We really do not want violence, conflict and instability for anyone.

If we cannot know who the wheat and weeds are this side of the grave then we do have to live for each other and find peace with justice across difference. We do not want children to be starving, disease ridden, deprived of education or made orphans - and that is happening to many. In our souls, at the bottom of our hearts, in the stirring of our consciences we cannot live with ourselves in a world where these things are happening. Our prayers are the stirrings of our very selves remembering, yearning, hoping, desiring, clamouring to the loving source of all that is - who we see in the face of Christ - that humanity can learn to live with difference and deal with injustice without descending into wheat and weeds mutual violence.

We pray that we might act. We pray that our spirits might stir other spirits to act-to give, to volunteer, to contact our MP's. We pray that our desires might tune us more clearly to the desires of God and that our prayers might change us - for good.

We pray for Theresa May, her government and our parliamentarians being stretched and contorted by the complexities of what was supposed to be a black and white decision - 'in or out?' We pray for the prime minister to be wise as well as resilient. For cabinet ministers to think of the whole country and the long term and not just their cause and short term politicking. And for MP's to bear heavily the task they have as the seat of our democracy to take responsible decisions for the well being of the whole nation and not just whether they will get back in at the next election. And that the press will hold politicians to account without hounding them for the sake of making their news outlet the most successful.

And we pray for those who - closer to home, nearer to us, those who we know are suffering for reasons of grief, loss, illness, the result of relationship breakdown or confusion, mental health issues, despair, addiction and a loss of hope.

For we want them - we really do want them (and ourselves if we are numbered amongst them) to feel the wind of faith which conveys meaning when all seems meaningless, the wind of hope which indicates good possibilities when all seems lost and the wind of love which uplifts our esteem when we feel deeply down. We pray for all to be touched by faith, hope and love - as we have seen it in the face of Christ.

* So.....Put your ear to the ground
and identify the noises around you.
Predominant are anxious, restless footsteps,
frightened footsteps in the dark,
footsteps bitter and divided.
No sound yet of hope's first footsteps.
Glue your ear to the ground again.
Hold your breath
put out your advance antennae.
The Master is on his way,
most likely he will not get here
when things are going well,
but in the bad times
when the going's unsure and painful.

In your soul look for Him...listen to Him...act for him..

Amen

- This final paragraph is a slight adaptation of a prayer from "A Procession of Prayers" compiled by John Carden. It was used by The Rev'd Dr John McNeil Scott, Principal of the Scottish United Reformed & Congregational College in the United Reformed Church's Daily Devotions on the 5th November 2018. These daily devotions can be sent every day to smart phones, iPad's etc. Just 'google' 'Daily Devotions United Reformed Church'

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