

I think that the Lectionary is today exhorting us to consider the forbearance of God in regard to the Creation. There is a great hysteria abroad about the safety or otherwise of the world we are inhabiting. It becomes very easy to attribute superstitious reasons for what transpires in it. It is true that the way we live in the world invites disaster on many occasions, and when it strikes us we are perhaps right to feel that the search for the correct way is sometimes a perilous one. We are also very ambitious, and when we fly too near the sun, we find the fixtures and fittings we have devised inadequate to secure our imaginative success.

But the psalms remind us that the world is not made to be a chaos or an enigma: it is made for us to live in. And God knows of what we are made. He has not created us as we are by mistake, but in wisdom. The freedoms, the spaces which surround us, the very field where our imagination and our fruitfulness can take flight, is his gift. He has not acted like this in order to deceive us or to disappoint us, but to help us to aspire and grow to be like him, and for our own choices to be engaged in the process.

Since Eve's conversation with the serpent our greatest danger has been to leave out of our account the voice of God that we have heard. She measured the meaning of her deed against all the registers of her own nature except the one that is vital: our capacity to listen to God and to fulfil the word of we have heard. And a human life that is closed to the voice of God is not an indifferent force in the creation, but an enemy; because without the creating word we fall short of our true dignity and destiny, and we bring down all that we touch to a state of subversion and frustration. The planting of bad seed is the work of an enemy, and it is thus that the world becomes fouled with false fruit, and human lives becalmed in a dead sea.

At first we can respond to the undoubted presence of evil around us with the resort to judgment and power. The urge to dig out the offending elements from our world is natural to us. But it is itself a form of rebellion; because it is mysteriously not the way of God. The telling phrase in the parable is of extraordinary power and I offer it to you today to be thought about carefully, because it is worth long meditation. To the suggestion of uprooting the weeds, the farmer replies

*No, lest collecting the weeds you should uproot together with them the wheat.
Let them both grow until the harvest.*

The inescapable complexity of the situation is very clear: the stability of the wheat - threatened as it is by the nearness of evil- depends in some way upon the stability of the weeds, and behind that on the stability of the mercy of God which is ready to endure their presence. What is vital to the cause of justice is the certainty of the harvest: when the angels will come to separate the good from the bad crop, and there will be a safe barn for the good seed and fire for the weeds.

The prayer for the divine kingdom to come is set close to the prayer for forgiveness - *for* us, and *in* us. The parable says that the field is the world; but it is also our own life. Our own threatened stability as Christians is bound up with the mystery of evil, and all the unworthy elements that have become trapped in our individual life. To pray for judgment to be wrought on the world is our hope; but it will not leave any one of us unmarked or unconvulsed when it comes. *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive* is our only defence; because that is the Lord's prayer, and to pray it makes us like him in his own merciful love.