

Sunday 19th July 2020 – Trinity 6

In hope we were saved.

Today's service, with our return to Christ Church & the reality of sharing bread together again in fellowship, the lighting of the Paschal candle reminds us how coming back to church is a celebration of resurrection. Every Sunday we celebrate that we are people of the resurrection. Today, with the church building renewed, the new chapel nearly complete and the sanctuary furniture here at last, there is great cause for celebration and we do and should celebrate!

And yet, we also lament because we may not sing together, we can't all be together in the flesh, and we are celebrating in a country where 45,000 have lost their lives and a world where half a million people have died from Covid-19. For each fatality there are bereaved families and friends. Tens of thousands more have suffered from it; there have been other virus-related deaths, and the economic effects are making themselves felt even in our own locality as we see shops in Bath close.

'Creation,' Paul says, 'is subjected to futility.... in the hope that it will be set free from its bondage and obtain the freedom of God.'

The pandemic underlines for us that there is what may seem like futility, certainly suffering and disaster at the heart of the natural world. Competition and death are the engine of the process of natural selection by which we have evolved. The pandemic only reminds us of something we all know - that we are mortal.

But our specifically Christian hope is founded on the fact that at the heart of the suffering creation, God suffers too, with us and for us. The mystery of the cross is that suffering and hope are inseparable. Although inexplicable to us, it seems to be the case that the suffering of the cross was necessary for the resurrection. And resurrection is not just for Christ, not just for us, but for the whole of humanity and for creation also. 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth' John tells us in his vision of the end of time.¹ That is our hope in the face of our own mortality and the planet's vulnerability.

One of the ways of understanding the parable of the wheat and the weeds is as a recognition that in each of us there is good and bad, genuine wheat and harmful weeds. The futility, suffering and disaster have a counterpart in us. And God allows us to grow, rubbing along together because there is some 'good grain,' something 'redeemable' in all of us and we have a chance, if we keep the ears and eyes of our hearts open, to learn

¹ Revelation 21

love and patience from the good in each other. No one of us is free from the 'weeds' of impatience and arrogance, laziness, and self-love.

But in the end, at the end of our time, whenever and however we come to it, we come face to face with God in what the Bible calls judgement. And at that time the bad tempered and arrogant and self-regarding bits of us will be recognised and set apart to be destroyed. They can't come near God's perfection so at last we, all of us, can be free of the sin that clings to us so closely and be made perfect as God is perfect so we can shine, as Jesus promises like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.