

**Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, St. Mary's  
Wimbledon, Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2017, Trinity 6**

In the best fairy tales the good Witch waves her magic wand and conquers the powers of the evil Witch. The Princess is released from prison and marries Prince Charming and they all lived happily ever after. But life is not like that.

We would all like to imagine a world where God reigned supreme waving a magic wand to dispel evil from the world but God is not like that.

In our Gospel passage the good seeds are sown and the plants grow up but also so do the weeds. Any gardener knows what that is like. As I look at my garden it seems that the weeds are winning!

The power of evil is strong in our world today and sometimes we can doubt the sovereignty of God. We read of acid attacks on innocent bystanders; attacks by people on mopeds, the recent terrorist attacks in Manchester, Westminster and on London Bridge, to name but a few. We saw the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower with the death and injury of many people and even more people made homeless and traumatised by this tragic event. Yes evil is present in our world.

Our immediate reaction may be to ask the question:

*"Where was God in all these tragic events? Why did he or she not do something?"*

God was there alongside all those suffering people. God was there weeping with them. God was there using men and women to help those in need. A God of love and compassion used human beings as his hands on earth.

However we may want accountability, judgement and punishment for the evil doers. Human judgement may be harsher than divine judgement.

In our first reading from the book of Wisdom, chapter 12 verses 18 and 19 we see the sovereignty of God acknowledged by the writer:

*".... Although you are sovereign in  
strength , you judge with  
mildness,  
and with great forbearance you govern us,*

*you have power to act  
whenever you choose.*

*Through such works you have  
taught your people  
that the righteous must be kind,  
and you have filled your children with good hope  
because you give repentance for sins...."*

So although the Wisdom writer recognises that there is sin and evil in the world, God will be the judge and we are given hope because there is also repentance for our sins.

We read too in John's Gospel:

*"Indeed God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."  
(John 3: 17)*

St. Paul knew all about evil and suffering and imprisonment. Before his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, Paul, as Saul, was part of the evil persecution of the early Christians. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that Saul witnessed the stoning to death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Saul repented of his sins and became a missionary for Christ. He was certainly at the receiving end of much suffering and evil deeds as he suffered for his Christian faith and witness to Christ as he travelled on his missionary journeys.

Nevertheless Paul was able to write to the Christians of Rome:

*"... I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about revealed to us..." (Roms.8:18).*

Again like the writer of Wisdom Paul gives the Christians in Rome hope despite any suffering they may be experiencing ;

*"... For in hope we were saved.  
Now hope that is seen is not hope.  
For who hopes what is seen?  
But if we hope for what we do not see,  
we wait for it with patience"... (Roms. 8:25).*

How difficult it is to wait with ‘*patient hope*’ . Our world today demands instant action, instant gratification. Patience and Hope are not easy virtues to cultivate. We can only do this by the Grace of God working within us. As we equip ourselves by prayer and bible reading and by receiving strength through this Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Although the passages from Wisdom and from Romans give us hope we cannot get away from the passage from Matthew regarding judgement. At one time sermons regarding hell-fire and judgement were preached on a regular basis particularly in churches of a more Calvinistic background. But when we look at the history of the Christian Church we can see some very dark times when strong weeds seemed to dominate over rich harvests of wheat. Even today the Church’s recent history contains evidence of allegations of sexual abuse, misuse of church funds etc. Yes the Church contains both saints and sinners. The rich harvest of wheat grows alongside the bad harvest of weeds.

The imagery of Matthew’s Gospel is rich. We read that the Son of Man will send his angels to collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evildoers, and they will be thrown into the furnace of fire. This is reminiscent of the ‘fiery furnace that we read about in the book of Daniel. ...”The righteous shining like the sun reminds us of Daniel’s prediction of the resurrected glory of God’s people.

The final judgement will be God’s and we have to live our lives remembering that fact. Be we also have the knowledge and hope that Jesus came to redeem the world and to save us from our sins.

Let us remember the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans:

... *“I am convinced that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed to you...” (Roms.8.18)*

So we continue to work for the coming of God’s Kingdom here on earth, here in Wimbledon. We ask God for strength that we may be able to witness to Christ to the people we meet each day.

*Amen.*