

7th Sunday After Pentecost
St Paul's Manuka – 23 July, 2017
Preacher: The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas

Genesis 28: 10-19a
Psalm 139: 1-9, 23-24
Romans 8: 12-25
Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43.

Chaos can be very much a part of human living. We can look at our world at present and see the dysfunction and chaos that is occurring in many places – places of war and even governments on the world stage. Only yesterday we heard about the chaos in the White House as the Press Secretary resigned. There seems to be disconnection which produces uncertainty and questioning. I don't think this is anything new in the history of the world. Times of war, bad government and natural disaster have brought about chaos and the uncertainty that many people experience. Recent terrorism in our world reminds us of the uncertainty chaos encourages in our lives. We live in times when some people are intent on hurting others and disrupting the life we value. The recent events in the United States where an Australian woman was tragically shot remind us all of the fragility of life just as much as the events of war and terrorism we see before on our television screens day by day.

Science even speaks to us of chaos theory. Chaos theory is the science of surprises, of the nonlinear and the unpredictable. It teaches us to expect the unexpected. While most traditional science deals with supposedly predictable phenomena like gravity, electricity, or chemical reactions, Chaos Theory deals with nonlinear things that are effectively impossible to predict or control, like turbulence, weather, the stock market, our brain states, and so on.

As I read today's Gospel passage I see chaos as well as Jesus tells us a story about a farming situation. This parable speaks of someone who planted good seed with the expectation of a good crop but whose plans were frustrated by some enemy who comes in the dark of night and sows weeds among the wheat. It is the presence of the weeds that brings about the chaos. The slaves of the householder come to him quite anxious and disturbed about the chaos of the situation, seeking the purity of the wheat alone. They ask where these weeds came from and wonder about the fate of the crop. In the chaos of the situation the slaves want to go in and pull up the weeds to preserve the purity. The master knows that this is not a good idea since in uprooting the weeds the wheat will also be uprooted. The chaos of such a situation will destroy the whole crop. There will be a time says the landowner when the weeds and the wheat

can be harvested together. There will be a time when the weeds can be burned and the wheat can be safely stored in the barn for future use.

As I read this passage I can hear the anxiety of the slaves as a situation of chaos emerges. They are the ones who want purity and all ambiguity to be gone. I can also hear the greater plan and the wisdom of the landowner who knows that there is a situation of chaos now but things will work out in the fullness of time.

Jesus's explanation of the parable in verses 36-43 is almost too neat and is probably an interpolation of the early church arising from a desire to know what the parable meant. Jesus was probably happier to leave the parable as it was and to let its message percolate but people often require explanation in the face of chaos, wanting everything nailed down, and so we have these verses of explanation. The parable, we are told, is about the kingdom of God and how God's goodness can be disturbed by chaos. The parable is also about how in the fullness of time the plan of God will come to fruition. That which is chaotic, the present world, will be swept away as the completeness of God's plan and kingdom comes to its conclusion. The parable is about the end times of the world. The kingdom of God is here now – Jesus's presence in the world and his work of salvation is proof of that – but the kingdom is not complete. The life of the world as it exists is still chaotic, incomplete and full of ambiguity and imperfection – even though Jesus is here and his work of salvation is active. At the end of time chaos will be swept away and the completeness of the kingdom will come – no chaos or ambiguity, no weeds, but only the certainty and completion of God's plan and love for us.

As I read this Gospel passage it speaks to me with encouragement about the situation of our world. Yes there are times of chaos but in the fullness of time we will all know the completeness of God's kingdom – God's plan and love. The Gospel also speaks to me with encouragement about the chaos of our own Anglican Communion at the present time.

You may know that over the last few years there has been some chaos in the way we Anglicans live in our world Anglican Communion. This of course is nothing new. Some Anglicans are committed to diversity and realise that in this life we have chaos and ambiguity. Other Anglicans are less happy with that situation and want certainty – even purity. They are a little like the slaves who want to rush in and fix everything up so that it is neat and tidy. Those who work in this way respond to particular issues of our communion – particularly sexual morality and church order – rather than focussing on the nature of the communion in Christ that we share with one another as a whole. There are those who have broken away – particularly in Africa and in North America who see their particular brand of Anglicanism as pure and without error. They point

the finger at others and condemn others, being unprepared to embrace the situation of human life – with all its chaos and ambiguity. To my mind this is very unhealthy and very divisive. Only a few weeks ago an alternative bishop was consecrated by this narrow view in Chicago, intended to serve as the pure bishop in Britain and Europe, outside and without the permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The same thing has happened in other parts of the world. What saddens me more than anything is that three Australian bishops (the Archbishop of Sydney, the Bishop of Tasmania and the Bishop of North West Australia) all travelled to Chicago and took part in this consecration of what can only be called a schismatic bishop who will minister in the legitimate dioceses of other bishops. This is simply wrong and offends Anglican tradition.

Many years ago at the end of the sixteenth century an Anglican writer by the name of Richard Hooker wrote a long text called *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in which he criticised actions like those we have seen in Chicago. He was objecting to the austere Biblicism he saw in the Puritans and arguing that this sort of narrow view destroyed the whole. His view was that the chaos we see in the world and indeed in the church is normal since we are human and that it is far better to live with one another in love and dialogue, in all our ambiguity and diversity, than to go into our own corners and condemn others and act unilaterally in ways that work against communion in Christ. Richard Hooker's words have stood the test of time and yet the narrow view speaks loudly and long. Hooker's genius was to state that things are not so clearly defined as people sometimes want. I think Jesus would have agreed with him and that is exactly what is behind this Gospel passage today. We need, says Hooker, to be careful about our claims of how things should be and perhaps be content to live with some chaos and ambiguity since this is the way human life really is. Yes we have certainty that at the end of time there will be the kingdom in all its fullness, but that is not now and we have to live with uncertainty rather than comprehensive programs of how things should be. We know as Paul tells us that we are not slaves and that we live in the power of the Spirit. We are the children of God in all our diversity and it is in this state that we wait with eager longing for the revealing of God's fullness. The futility we know now will disappear and we will be set free, says Paul, as we obtain the fullness of the glory of the children of God. There are groanings and pains now but redemption is coming in its fullness and we have hope that requires us to wait in patience. The desire for purity by some within our Anglican Communion is not only unrealistic but also immature and this message needs to be heard as they seek to get rid of what they see as wrong. In seeking for purity they put the whole in danger. Jesus warns us about that sort of behaviour in today's Gospel. Jesus tells us to live with the chaos and ambiguity, the weeds if you like, and wait with patience as we seek dialogue rather than separation. Purity is not ours to seek but rather hope in the kingdom to come and its perfection is ours as

promise – but not now. May God gives us the patience and tolerance we all need.