

Digging up the weeds

Rob James *reflects on* Matthew 13:24-30. 36-43

Today's Gospel is one of Jesus' clearest references to the final judgement. His explanation of the parable of the weeds in the wheat is that the weeds – particularly those things that cause us to sin – will be burnt in the fire. The "righteous" will then be left, shining as brightly as the sun and in God's kingdom.

It is fortunate that we are not the judges of this process. It is God who is the judge. So it is wrong to think that anyone we know is destined for fire rather than God's kingdom. Justice may seem to require that evildoers will be burnt along with their deeds and with the injustices that cause evil. But whether the individual souls are nothing but an impurity to be burnt away is for God to decide. Because we believe in God's mercy as well as God's justice, we should hope that the fire contains no souls at all.

There is one person that it seems reasonable to judge, albeit in an interim rather than eternal way, and that is ourselves. Can we be more like the wheat and less like the weeds? Can we burn the evil in our lives, so that it is not there for God to deal with later? By the grace of God, we can. ☺



Merciful Lord, grant us right judgement in what we do, that we may carry out your will for our lives and for your world. Burn away our sin that we may shine brightly in the world to your glory. Amen.

Books of the Old Testament – *Proverbs*

by Trevor Dennis

Scripture scholar Trevor Dennis makes his final contribution to this series, before handing the baton to Richard Greatrex.

Proverbs is a collection of sayings and reflections spanning many centuries in the life of ancient Israel, ascribed to Solomon as a mark of honour. Most of the teachers whose work is represented here were men, but Wisdom is personified as a woman in the early chapters, and the conclusion to the whole work is a mother's instruction to her daughter.

In the first nine chapters we have a series of poems on Wisdom, God's first companion and enduring delight. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," we are told (9:10), not to make us literally afraid of God, but to remind us that a right relationship with God is the foundation of all true living.

Admittedly, Proverbs' teaching can be of its time and should no longer belong to ours: it advocates the corporal punishment of children, and contains some cruel sayings which put women down. Yet so much of its teaching still rings true, and is as challenging now as it was then. ☺

Lesser-known people of the Bible

Priscilla and Aquila

by Caroline Fletcher

This married couple are mentioned by name six times in the New Testament in four different books: Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians and 2 Timothy. They were converts from Judaism fleeing Rome after the Emperor Claudius expelled Jews. They went to Corinth in Greece where they met the apostle Paul who lived with them, sharing in their tent-making trade and preaching the Gospel there. So close were they to him, that they risked their lives for the apostle (Romans 16:4).

They played an important role in teaching the early Church: training the preacher, Apollos, and using their homes for the first churches. However, what really intrigues scholars is why Priscilla is usually named before her husband, something unusual then. Was she a more prominent Christian than Aquila? Some even suggest she may have written the New Testament's anonymous letter to the Hebrews. Whatever the truth, they were certainly a remarkable couple. ☺

“If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink”

Proverbs 25:21