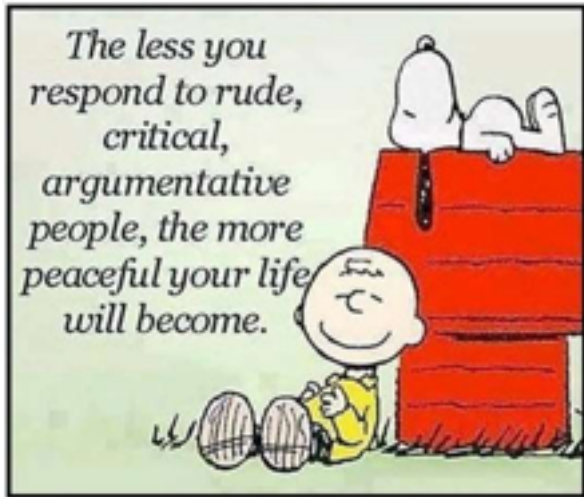


26 July PP&EiG

Rm 8 v 26-end - Encouragement of the Spirit + predestination = nothing can separate us from God.
Strength in the Spirit, god has no bad plans, we cannot be parted from God
Mt 13 v 31-33,44-52 - The Mustard seed + hidden Treasure + a costly pearl and the drag net
Size is unimportant, the costly pearl, Dragnet is about the final judgement, nb there is treasure in the old and the new



This picture is my starter for today. Sadly we live in a world that lives by rude, critical and argumentative inputs to our lives.

While I will defend the freedom of the media etc - the alternative is state or other control. And the church has not always been entirely innocent. IE the inquisition and even in our own CofE history there are all too many stories of inappropriate church control of what we believe and how to behave. When I was first ordained I was not allowed to marry anyone who had been divorced and I remember the first funeral I took the grieving widow told me how she had married for a second time and that subsequently she was not allowed to receive communion or join the Mothers

Union. She had left the church and from that day until arranging her husband's funeral had not been near the church All this and many more bits of church history have kept me thinking about how much of what we have inherited is or ever was right? OK you may be asking should I be an ordained person daring to ask such questions - my answer is that we need to be critical friends. No human organisation is perfect and all organisations need critical friends. But there is a difference between being a critical friend and being simply argumentative.

Jesus in these stories is telling a series of stories about the importance of small is good and can have an influence way beyond = catalyst, a critical friend, for the farmer Jesus uses the image of a particularly small seed, for the housewife, it is the power of yeast, the smallest by quantity in a loaf of bread, for the businessman, a pearl small but very valuable is more important than all the rest of his wealth. And then we get the dragnet which for me parallels last weeks sermon about the wheat and the tares **And** how the bad will be dealt with at the end of time - it not up to us to do the judgement.

In summary you could say that Jesus is saying that we should get on and enjoy life - don't let the rude **etc** get you down

St Paul in his letter to the Romans in today's readings is picking up on this. God's plans are consistently Good - cannot be otherwise and the Holy Spirit will strengthen our resolve, will give us resilience and consequently nothing else can separate us from the love of God.

Put all this together reminds me of a 'campaign' by a Baptist minister who was v active in the '80s about developing the Ministry of Encouragement - a ministry that all of us can exercise regardless of whether we are ordained, licensed, baptised or plain ordinary Mr and Mrs Blogs. Jesus was always trying to encourage people, He could be a critical friend to the Chief Priests etc and at the same time help the most vulnerable like the ten lepers. Even when let down (denied) by His closest team member (Peter) there is no blame only loving reinstatement.

For me, Jesus was not "rude and argumentative" He wanted them **whoever** to grow into a new fullness of life - He could still be a critical friend but always ENCOURAGING.