

Epiphany 5, 2017

“Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”  
(Colossians 3.14)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The original St. George’s Church in Moncton burned in December, 1873. On the morning after the fire, some ladies of the parish gathered to pick through the ruins. They were especially careful to collect some small diamond panes of glass, as well as broken pieces, on the spot where the Chancel of the Church originally stood. These glass fragments were sent to a company in the city of Saint John. There they were pieced together into two windows, the windows that are now on either side of the Altar in the Chapel. They are the only items which remain from the first Church.

In the second St. George’s Church, these two windows were on the north side of the nave. But their present position in the Sanctuary seems to be very fitting because, as Archdeacon Alexander said, “The cluster grapes and the stocks of wheat suggest the bread and wine which Jesus used as symbols of His Flesh and Blood. They direct our thoughts to the events in the Upper Room or remind us of the words of the apostle of the Gentiles, ‘As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till He comes.’ (1 Corinthians 11:26)”

In this morning’s Gospel, we heard a parable about wheat. The Lord Jesus was teaching great crowds by the sea. In fact, the crowd was so big, that He got into a boat and faced the people as they stood on the beach. Jesus often used stories called parables to make His point; and one of the parables He told that day was about the wheat and the tares. ‘Tares’ is an old word that was used to describe weeds – particularly a weed that looked a lot like wheat.

In this parable, we hear how, after the farmer planted good seed in his field, an enemy came at night and sowed tares. Of course, no one knew this until the blades of grass pushed up through the soil. Then, the servants who worked on the farm were perplexed. They wondered how this happened and asked the farmer. He told them that an enemy had done it. “Should we go and pull up the weeds, then?” the servants asked. “No,” said the farmer “because, in doing so, you might pull up the wheat, too. Let both grow together until harvest. Then, we shall gather

the tares, bind them in bundles and burn them; and the wheat we will gather into my barn”.

After the Jesus finished teaching the crowds that day, he left the beach area and went into a house. His disciples went in with Him and asked Him to explain this parable. “The One Who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man,” Jesus said. “The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom (the children of God). The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.”

Our Lord’s explanation was definite: when Christ comes again, all causes of sin and wickedness and blasphemy and un-holiness will be dealt with. There will be a day of reckoning, of accounting, and it will not be pretty. Jesus used the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” to describe that awful time. But, He also said, “Then the righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father”.

In the Epistle this morning, we are given some insight into this heavenly kingdom. It is a kingdom without any signs of greed and selfishness, hatred or arrogance. It is a kingdom completely different from the world we live in now. There is a new life in that heavenly kingdom – the new life which is free from sin. St. Paul describes it like this: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another, and... forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

Listening to these words, and reflecting on the goodness of the qualities – compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, love and peace – we know that this new life is something we all need. It is something we need; it is something our children and grandchildren need; and it is something the world desperately needs. But it is not something we can get on our own – we know that

just by the daily news. Left to our own devices, we are selfish, greedy and unforgiving. We are like the tares in the parable. However, God, in His mercy, offers us an opportunity to be wheat. He offers to bring His Life into our hearts by His Spirit. That's what He does in Baptism – He comes, by His Spirit to live within us and bring us the new life of Jesus's Resurrection from the dead.

Everyone knows that wheat is needed to make flour; and, in turn, flour is needed to make bread. And, interestingly, the Lord Jesus called Himself the 'Bread of Life'. It is our prayer today that, as those whom He has adopted in Baptism, and made wheat, so He would continue His gracious work of making us into Bread – the very Bread of Life -- stirring up our wills and joining us to Himself. For then, whatever we do, in word or deed, we will do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Him.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...