

Sermon 19th July 2026 (Rev'd Ray Shergill)

Isaiah 44:6-8

"This is what the Lord says—

Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:

I am the first and I am the last;

apart from me there is no God.

⁷ Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and lay out before me

what has happened since I established my ancient people,

and what is yet to come—

yes, let them foretell what will come.

⁸ Do not tremble, do not be afraid.

Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?

No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Parable of the Weeds

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

The Parable of the Weeds Explained

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Let us pray (Deuteronomy 32):

"Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear you, earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants. I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!"

My precious Lord, through your Holy Spirit, may the spoken word and the unspoken word be a moment of transformation for each one of us, take us deeper in understanding and love for you. In Jesus' mighty name we pray. **Amen**

Sermon:

My brothers and sisters in Christ, there are moments in Scripture when God speaks with such clarity, such tenderness, and such authority that the words seem to steady the trembling places within us. Isaiah 44 is one of those moments. Israel is surrounded by uncertainty, threatened by nations, tempted by idols, and worn down by fear. Into that atmosphere, God declares: "I am the first, and I am the last; apart from me there is no God." It is not a whisper. It is a stabilising proclamation. God is saying, "Anchor yourself in Me. I am your beginning, your ending, and everything in between." And then He adds something even more intimate: "Do not tremble, do not be afraid... You are my witnesses." God is not simply asserting His sovereignty; He is inviting His people into confidence. Into courage. Into identity. You are my witnesses. You are the ones who carry My presence into the world.

And that is where Matthew chapter 13 meets us. Jesus tells a parable about wheat and weeds, about a field where good seed is sown, but an enemy comes at night and scatters weeds among it. When the servants discover the weeds, their instinct is to pull them up immediately. But the master says, "No. Let both grow together until the harvest." My brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a story about patience, discernment, and trust. It is a story about living faithfully in a world where good and evil grow side by side. And it is a story about identity, because Jesus later explains that the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.

Isaiah says, "You are my witnesses." Jesus says, "You are the good seed." Both passages speak to who we are and how we live in a world that is not yet fully healed.

1. God's People in a Mixed Field: Jesus' parable is honest. He does not pretend the world is tidy. He does not pretend the church is untouched by struggle. He does not pretend that discipleship is lived in a greenhouse where conditions are controlled and predictable. Instead, He says: "The field is the world." And in that world, wheat and weeds grow together. The weeds, Jesus calls them "tares," they look almost identical to wheat in their early stages. You cannot easily tell them apart. They grow intertwined. And if you try to pull them up too soon, you risk damaging the wheat.

Jesus is teaching us something profound: Not everything that looks like wheat is wheat, and not everything that looks like weeds is hopeless. God sees clearly even when we cannot. And so, He calls His people to patience. To trust. To endurance. To the long view of the Kingdom. Isaiah echoes this: "Who then is like me? Let them proclaim it."

God is saying, St Paul's...."I see what you cannot see. I know what you cannot know. I hold what you cannot hold." St Paul's church, Beckenham: the world may feel tangled. Life may feel mixed. But God is not confused. God is not threatened. God is not overwhelmed. And neither should His people be.

2. You Are the Wheat, Planted With Purpose: Because Jesus says the good seed is “the people of the kingdom.” That means you are not an accident in the field. You are not randomly scattered. You are intentionally planted. You are placed where you are, for a reason. In your neighbourhood. In your workplace. In your family. In this church. In this season. You are wheat in a world that desperately needs nourishment. Isaiah says, “You are my witnesses.” Jesus says, “You are the good seed.” Both are identity statements. Both are commissioning statements. Both remind us that the people of God are meant to be a sanctuary in the field. Not a fortress. Not a bunker. Not a hiding place. But a sanctuary, where the presence of God is recognisable, where His peace is tangible, where His love is embodied.

The Lighthouse Keeper

I want to tell you a story of Sam, a lighthouse keeper on a rugged coastline. Every evening Sam would light the lamp that guided ships safely through the dangerous waters. One night, a storm rolled in, violent, relentless, unforgiving. Sam climbed the narrow stairs, lit the lamp, and prayed that the light would hold. Hours later, a ship captain arrived at the lighthouse, soaked and trembling. He said, “We saw nothing but darkness and waves. But then, through the storm, we saw your light. It was small, but it was steady. And because it was steady, we knew where safety was.” Sam replied, “The storm was fierce. The winds were strong. But the light was never mine. I only tended it.”

St Paul’s, this is who we are in the field. We are not the source of the light. We are the keepers of it. We tend the flame of Christ’s presence in a world that is often storm-tossed. We are the wheat that nourishes. We are the witnesses that shine. We are the sanctuary that steadies trembling hearts.

3. Living as a Sanctuary in a World of Weeds: I wonder what it means to be a sanctuary? It means we live with courage because God says, “Do not tremble.” It means we live with clarity because God says, “You are my witnesses.” It means we live with patience because Jesus says, “Let both grow together until the harvest.” It means we live with hope because Jesus promises that the righteous will “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Being a sanctuary does not mean we escape the field. It means we embody Christ in the field. It means we refuse to be shaped by fear. It means we refuse to be defined by the weeds. It means we refuse to give up when the world feels tangled. And it means we carry the presence of Jesus wherever we go.

4. The Courage to Stay Planted: You might agree with me that sometimes we want God to pull up the weeds immediately. Remove the difficulty. Remove the opposition. Remove the tension. Remove the people who frustrate us. Remove the circumstances that stretch us. But Jesus says, “Let them grow together.” I wonder why? Because wheat grows stronger when it learns to root deeply. Because faith matures when it learns to trust God’s timing. Because character forms when we learn to live faithfully in the mixed places. God is not slow. God is not absent. God is not indifferent. God is forming His people into a sanctuary that can withstand storms, shine in darkness, and nourish the world.

The Harvest Belongs to Jesus: The parable ends with Jesus saying that at the harvest, He will send His angels, He will separate the wheat from the weeds, and He will gather His people into His kingdom. Please remember the harvest is not our job. The judgment is not our job. The sorting is not our job. The timing is not our job. Our job is to be wheat. Our job is to be witnesses. Our job is to be a sanctuary. Our job is to shine with the steady, faithful, gentle light of Jesus.

A Sanctuary People in a Sanctuary Church: St Paul's church, Beckenham, you are called to be a sanctuary, not just a sanctuary building, but a sanctuary people. A people who carry peace into anxious spaces. A people who carry hope into weary hearts. A people who carry compassion into hurting lives. A people who carry Jesus into every corner of the field. Isaiah says, "You are my witnesses." Jesus says, "You are the good seed." The Spirit says, "You are my sanctuary."

If we truly embrace our identity as God's witnesses and Jesus' good seed, then change is not only inevitable, it is necessary. Sanctuary people do not remain static. Wheat grows. Witnesses speak. Lightkeepers tend the flame.

St Paul's church as you step into the days ahead, carry this question with you:

"Where is Jesus inviting you to be a sanctuary, in the field He has planted you?"

Not in theory. Not in imagination. But in the real places you inhabit, your home, your workplace, your neighbourhood, your relationships. Where is He asking you to shine? Where is He asking you to root deeply? Where is He asking you to witness courageously? Where is He asking you to tend the light faithfully? Let that question shape your prayers. Let it shape your conversations. And let it shape your choices.

Because we need to lift our eyes to the One who is the First and the Last, who walks among the wheat. The One who sows good seed, has planted you and me with purpose. The One who sees the field clearly, holds our future securely. The One who shines brighter than the sun, will gather His people with joy. And until that day, He calls you to be His sanctuary, a living, breathing, Spirit-filled witness to the love, mercy, and saving power of Jesus Christ. And remember, Jesus is the Sower who never makes mistakes. Jesus is the Shepherd who never loses His sheep. Jesus is the Light that never flickers in the storm. Jesus is the Lord who stands as the First and the Last over every tangled field. And He has planted you, intentionally, lovingly, purposefully, to be His sanctuary.

So go into the field with courage. Go into the field with hope. Go into the field with the steady flame of Christ burning within you. Because the world needs wheat. The world needs witnesses. The world needs sanctuaries. And Jesus has chosen you St Paul's to be His." **God bless us all. Amen**