

Trinity 9, Proper 11, Year A
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We're in the middle of a series of parables about the kingdom of heaven. As I've said before, I don't think this is about what happens when we die—Holy Scripture says almost nothing about that (and certainly does not say that we go to heaven)—but rather about what it could be like here and now. Last week with the parable of the sower I said that it was a parable of the prodigal farmer, the wastefully generous farmer, and today's gospel is a variation on that theme of generosity.

It's an everyday story of country folk advising them not to pull out the weeds before the good crops are ready, because in getting rid of the rubbish you might damage the good. One of its message to me is not to fuss about getting things precisely perfect. The time for that will come as the time for weeding will come, perhaps at harvest when you can more easily sort out what's worth keeping from what's to be thrown away. Let's not be too hasty about making decisions. Apparently ugly ducklings can turn into swans.

This describes the reality of life on earth in which there is a constant struggle to survive, and provide the means of future life. And a constant struggle within each of us between the good and the bad. My model of being human is that of a supermarket trolley. Left to its own devices, it refuses to go in a straight line, and it needs a regular guiding hand to keep it on course.

The parable is about the church, too: the kingdom of God on earth, as we say week, in week out, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. And all these agricultural parables point to the crucifixion and resurrection: the death of the old enabling the transformed new life to follow on. Early Christian writers compared the blood of Christ—that is the crucifixion—to the water that irrigates soil and gives life to the crops; they said that the blood of the martyrs, who gave their lives for the kingdom of God, irrigated the soil of the Church, and brought forth new life.

And this is what we symbolise in baptism: a washing away of the old life to enable new life following Christ's teaching and example, the helping hand to keep the supermarket trolley on course.

The potential for this new life is within us all, the Christ within, the divine core within, if we will let it flourish and fill our skins. Today we must vow to nurture this new life in William James, Henry Edward and Emelia Jayne. We must be vigilant to care for and protect it in them, and, as we recall our own baptismal promises, in us all. The newly baptised are joining a 2000 year old procession of witness to truth. Baptism signifies the indwelling Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit, ever dwelling in the holiest realms of light;
Holy Spirit, ever brooding o'er a world of gloom and night;
Holy Spirit, ever raising Sons of earth to thrones on high;
Living, life-imparting Spirit, Thee we praise and magnify.

Holy Spirit, ever living as the church's very life;
Holy Spirit, ever striving through her in a ceaseless strife;
Holy Spirit, ever forming in the church the mind of Christ;
Thee we praise with endless worship for thy fruit and gifts unpriced.

Holy Spirit, ever working through the church's ministry;
Quickening, strengthening, and absolving, setting captive sinners free.
Holy Spirit, ever binding age to age, and soul to soul,
In a fellowship unending—thee we worship and extol.

Words: Timothy Rees (20th C)