

### **An Undivided Heart**

“... give me an undivided heart to revere your name” says the psalmist, according to the NRSV translation, which is probably more accurate than the prayer book “let my heart delight to fear your name”. An undivided heart: wouldn't that be a state of peace and grace, to not know division and uncertainty and contradiction within our own heart. An undivided heart: isn't that in some ways the goal and destiny of faith. An undivided heart: isn't that what our spirit's groan for as we labour toward the fulfilment of God's work in us.

And yet most of us know what it is like to have a divided heart. A heart divided by uncertainty, unfulfilled longing, contradictions between one desire and another, questions and memories that trouble us. We are so often divided selves.

Or in the language of St Paul we are divided between flesh and spirit. However it is important to know that Paul does not mean anything as crude or simple as physical bodies vs some disembodied spirit, for he clearly believes that the Spirit of God can make mortal bodies eternal and sacred.

Rather he is referring, I believe, to the struggle between the small local self that is concerned only with the immediate needs of now (the body and the ego) and the eternal universal true self in which we are born into, or adopted into, God. Paul should always be read first as a mystic and only then as a commentator of morality!

If those things which divide our hearts were easy to identify then it would be much easier to deal with. If it was clear what was right and what was wrong; if it was clear what was life giving and what led to death; if it was clear what was best for others and what might harm or diminish others then we might have the confidence to weed the field of our heart. But so often we are divided by paradox – by two apparently good things calling us; two equally distressing options; two or more convincing arguments.

And for those times and situations the parable of the weeds or tares among the wheat is a parable for us. It works, as do most parables, on several levels. Firstly there is the sense in which wheat and weeds are referring to totally separate persons – you are either one or the other and therefore the whole person is either in or out. We have several of Matthew's common themes here – judgement leading to one group of people being vindicated and the other being punished and left out of the harvest or banquet. Matthew also often has burning of chaff and gnashing of teeth.

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Based on Isaiah 44:6-8; Psalm 86:11-17; Romans 8:12-25; and Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

He tends to add these images to many of the parables that Luke stops earlier. This particular parable only appears in Matthew's gospel. It has been speculated that Matthew had these concerns about judgement because of his community's experience of distress that the chosen people of God had not recognised in Jesus the Messiah and that they were/had been judged for this in the ruin of Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70CE and the dispersal of the Jews.

It is important to recognise also that separating of grain and chaff was a normal part of the harvesting by hand process as was burning the chaff that had little other use. These images were not of themselves automatically images of judgement in the sense of punishment but rather judgement in the more mundane sense of sorting things out.

And it is in this way that the parable works very well on the internal level. There is the lovely and loving advice of the owner of the field not to gather the weeds before the harvest as you would uproot the wheat along with the weeds, rather let them grow together and at harvest time it shall be sorted out. This is beautiful advice for those situations in which our hearts are divided by confusing or delicate matters that cannot be easily decided upon. Allow them to grow side by side and pray that in the fullness of God's season that there will be a sorting out and that the good wheat shall become apparent and flourish and the weed shall be gathered up and burnt up as is appropriate for all waste matter.

Sometimes we can discern clearly what is the way forward, what is right, what is of God, and sometimes it is not immediately clear. At those times let us trust the gardening of God in the fields of our hearts. Let us trust that the one who is first and last says do not be afraid, for if we seek to give our hearts to the one who is first and last then all is in God's tender care and we need not fear our eventual state of being. And let us trust the process that slowly groans within God and within us toward becoming most fully the children of God.

Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.