Ps 139:1-11; Rom 8: 12-25; Mt 13: 24-30, 36-43

Some words from our Psalm this morning:

‘O Lord you have searched me out and know me’, and, ‘even darkness is no darkness with you’

As I looked at the readings for today I noticed the reference in the epistle – Paul’s letter to the Romans – to ‘adoption’. It took me back some years to my early and middle career where I had a lot of involvement and responsibility in relation to adoptions and adoption services. This was the positive aspect of what was often otherwise in Social Services a very difficult and challenging job. Being involved with harrowing situations and ultimately deciding with other professionals the course of action to take in relation to children who may have been at risk at home, are some of the most difficult things I have had to do. Sometimes the eventual outcome was to decide to recommend to the court that a child should be adopted. This was especially difficult if it was not with the consent of the parent.

The adoption of a child, however, does provide for a new and permanent family and gives the child a sense of belonging and security within which he or she can thrive. Yesterday, visiting our daughter and husband in Manchester, we saw this at work with their two adopted children – aged 2 and nearly 6. Taking them for a walk in the pouring rain in the woods, seeing them holding the hands of parents, being picked up when fallen over, showing Mummy how to bash leaves with a stick and so on, one could see them utterly confident in who to turn to for encouragement and for comfort. Even when trouble arose at a meal with the elder one deciding not to eat his meal and becoming testy – not unusual at that age (!), one could see the learning and development of the child taking place within a relationship the child could trust.

The passage from Romans that we read is nearing the climax of Paul’s quite complex argument, dealing particularly with our relationship with God, and our less than perfect human nature. The point that he has been developing is that under the law of Moses – which was very extensive and covered all aspects of daily life, everyone is a failure, and if that defines our relationship with God – how good we are or not at keeping the law - then fear is inevitable. But, he says, there is no need for that as we are offered the ‘spirit of adoption’ which is an entirely different relationship whereby ‘we cry ‘Abba, Father’ – and become heirs of God. Such a huge contrast, and a relationship within which we can thrive.

Now hear some of the phrases of the Psalm again: (read) vs 3,4,6. Under the law and out of fear one might read them as ‘big brother’ catching you out; but hear them instead as God’s care for us as His children, God who knows our every weakness and loves us nonetheless. How enabling is this that we do not have to hide away in fear. We know how positive being fully known is in our normal relationships too – being accepted with all our foibles and mistakes. That first verse ’you searched me out and know me…’ invites us to recognise the closeness and intimacy of our relationship with God. In that final verse of the reading ‘even darkness is no darkness with you’ this evokes for me the picture of the child waking fearfully at night, but when the parent comes the child is comforted and is no longer conscious of the darkness. And so for us too, God is alongside in whatever our darkness may be, shedding on us the light of life.

As Paul tells us, this is all a work in progress and he gives us the image of creation groaning – a lovely phrase to which I think we can all relate! The end state towards which we are travelling and developing is the fulfilment of God’s kingdom, and we are within and part of that process. The key is the last word of that reading: ‘patience’ – and this links us to the gospel reading.

The gospel reading from Mt is also about bringing the Kingdom of God to fruition and dispensing with all that is contrary to God’s will. The parable itself is simple with the images of the wheat and weeds growing together and notice particularly the instruction to the workers to leave them - to be patient and exercise forbearance - until harvest time when they will be separated out. It is a static binary image for effect, and reminds me of old black and white movies where the ‘baddies’ are evident by the music played and their sinister looks. Similarly, some parts of the media deal only in terms of heroes and villains rather than the reality which is something of mix in all of us. No one, however, is unwaveringly all good or irredeemably all bad. The second part of the reading is thought by many commentators to have been added by the early church, and it shifts the parable to being an allegory and gives a meaning to every item in the story. Personally, looking at the first rendering of the story without the subsequent explanation, I can understand it best as a description of our own lives as a mix of behaviour, some altruistic and some self-interested, and that ultimately it is for God to deal with all that is negative.

What we can be confident about is that God is gathering in and will finally gather in all that he has created and nurtured - that is us as his adopted children. In that context and within that love we can all rest in God’s embrace and thrive.

Amen