

Trinity 1 Sermon.

Exodus 19:2-6, Romans 5:6-11, Mathew 9:36-10:8

A harvest of the moment and of eternity.



I guess that a goodly number of you were sowing seeds at the beginning of this pandemic not just because you thought the shops might run out of herbs and vegetables but because it is was that time of year. Certainly I did sow some things too and I thank you for boosting my tiny tomato plants from the seed of a rotten tomato with some larger and healthier plants. Not everybody here has the luxury of a garden and one of the few pleasures of this last couple of months has been seeing the folk in our local flats enjoying the church garden. When we added to its scope as part of our centenary plans – one of the key ideas was to make it useful as well as beautiful. I have eaten the first blackcurrant and the herbs are providing a little extra to local kitchens and cooks. I note the first pears on our “good Christian” pear trees. One has been promised to Fr.Paul at Eastwood for being such a good and dedicated Christian in the midst of serious illness – maybe we can raffle the others.

After the sowing and planting of such things we don't rush out immediately to harvest the crop – if we did we'd be disappointed. Patience, work and nurture are required – though much less with herbs and fruit than veg – hence my choice.

Surely it is puzzling then that our Lord in the Gospel speaks of harvest when the work is just begun. That great saint St.John Chrysostom born in Antioch in the 4th century and who we have studied and to whom we owe much in this parish – puts it very neatly in one of his sermons of which he “the golden-mouthed” was famous.

What on earth was Jesus talking about when the world was such a mess!

Harvest? St.John saw his own world like a field with thistles briars and weeds everywhere – what on earth was there to harvest?! We might look at our world at the moment and think the same as St.John. The world looks a complete mess!

Surely weeding, ploughing sowing and nurturing comes before any harvest can begin? But in the midst of the mess is the harvest. In the midst of the heartache, desert experience, the mele, the division, fear, injustice and grief the harvest is there. Harvest in the Old Testament is the word for the time when God intervenes. Our human nature is quite well disposed to credit itself when all it fine and dandy in the garden and then to blame others when it is not. The intervention of God humbles the first tendency and shames the second.

In our Old Testament reading in the Exodus, the Israelites are up against it – in the midst of the desert, the wilderness seemingly with nothing. God declares through

Moses they will be a consecrated nation – of course not for their own sake but for the sake of the whole of humanity. They will get above themselves and be successful and think higher of themselves than they ought they will be humbled by being taken a captive as a nation again and again. They will blame others and plot revolt and revenge and their prophets will say look into your own hearts first. They will seek to make themselves purer and purer and yet minds will become more soiled clogged and blind to grace and God's spirit.

What lies behind Paul's writing to the Romans is that nobody is worthy of the love of God, all are fallen and sinful and yet God in Christ dies for us whilst we are unclean and impure. There are no clean hands. In history or life - we must as Jesus points out elsewhere take the log from our own eye before examining the splinter in another's. History is a hot topic in our society at the moment and next week perhaps we will explore a little more some of the important Christian perspectives on this but for now – know Paul the persecutor, the torturer, the enslaver, who comes to know the undeserved grace of God in Christ as the scales of false purity and righteousness are torn from his eyes. It is echoed in the words of the 18th century slave trader and hymn writer who ironically himself became a slave of an African tribe - John Newton knew when the garden seemed to be paradise and when it seemed to be hell and yet found grace through both - amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.

In the Gospel we have the disciples listed – were they chosen for their purity, their virtue, their unsullied histories? Hardly – they are chosen because that's what God does – he takes vessels of clay like Moses and Paul and gives them an unbreakable spirit and confidence - not in themselves but in God. They are filled with a “joyful trust in God”. As Matthew puts it they have received without charge – they have earned nothing because of who they are but solely because of God's generosity and hence they are called to give – give without charge. Their places in history and more importantly in heaven are assured not because of who they are or what they achieved but because of grace at work in them and because of what God achieves in them. No power, no authority no eloquence no purity no wisdom of their own only the God given grace to say lord have mercy upon me and be open to his Grace. It may be an instant harvest or take a lifetime but it is always ready.

By the grace of God in Christ it is a harvest of the moment a harvest of the now and a harvest for eternity.



*The Revd David Wylie RN
St. Margaret of Antioch June 2020*