

## Harvest Festival Sermon 2020

Deuteronomy 8.7-18, 2. Corinthians 9.6-15, Luke 12.16-30

You may be tuning in from a different part of the world and today we celebrate Harvest Festival. It is not an “official church feast” but an occasion to celebrate in September or October the gathering in of the Harvest. It was interestingly only in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Church of England on the tail coats of what people actually did - developed a liturgy – a time of course when huge swathes of the population were leaving the stage of the harvest – the fields and orchards of our land and missed it. We may not have a clue what the difference is between a medlar and a mangel-wurzel or recognise wheat from barley but the importance of food (and drink) can never leave us – it is the prompt of the first cry and often the first thought for the marking of a special occasion. We cannot forget those empty shelves at the beginning of the pandemic and continue to experience the cruelty of this time when we cannot share normally this most fundamental of blessings with the abundance that is at the heart of our Old testament reading today.

What a vision of generosity it is in that Old Testament reading! The question at the heart of the Old Testament and at the heart of Jesus’s teaching is “will you recognise the right source of this Blessing – God and will you use it rightly?” Thanksgiving and responsibility are at the heart of it. Many of the problems of human kind come from a misinterpretation of the Old Testament term – dominion. It can be taken to mean ownership and I do what I like with what is mine mentality. But read deeper and the impermanence, and temporary nature of man’s role is writ large throughout the scriptures. And yet humanity is different and meant to be co-operators with God, made in his image and infinitely valued in the eyes of the creator. Look at Jesus words just before today’s telling parable. “you are worth more than many sparrows and all the hairs of your head are known to the Father.” Such love can lead to a spoilt child like “I can get away with anything” or a courage and confidence to endure any hardship life – it is a question of how the heart is oriented to the one who has ultimate dominion over all things.

I love food markets when travelling – I generally get very bored with the nik naks and garbage markets where everything had been made on the other side of the world from where you are. But food markets - they are always a treat and joy – even if we have no way of cooking the stuff. The colour, smell, variety and vitality. They show you the local character and even in harsh and difficult places food is life but also pleasure and joy beyond mere fuel. One of the joys of travelling with the church and the military is how often I’ve been with people who have had very little but want to share their best – it’s always humbling to be with folk whose heart is so oriented. Our second lesson stresses that generosity is everything – how could it be otherwise in the face of God’s generosity “God loves a cheerful giver” - it picks up many of our recent themes.

In the Gospel we have the wonderful parable of the rich man building ever bigger barns for his goods out of misplaced anxiety. It could be read as an anti-wealth parable or a manifesto for a care free life not worrying about anything and just accepting what comes along. It is neither really it does among many things though address two very modern issues – anxiety and need.

I have heard several times recently the phrase “it is a sin to die rich” – unlikely to be a temptation for many of us. Each time it’s been used it’s been attributed to someone different – Andrew Carnegie (the world’s richest ever man according to some calculations) and the other day I read it of RA Jones – the Jeweller - he of Priory park etc. Whoever first said it, there is truth in it although of course at that very moment – we take nothing out of this world anyway. But there is recognition that nothing belongs to us for ever. Nothing except of course, the Kingdom of God. All parables are about that. The right orientation of the heart and our role in the world is about that. Nothing can take away that

relationship with God or compare with it. And yet so often we exchange it in the words of the Psalmist “for a trifle” – not of the eating kind.

Anxiety is a default of our world – work, lack of work, love, lack of love, money lack of money, a future or lack of future, our children lack of children, health, opinions of others. Our society has an anxiety gene: higher goals for self, for others, greater. In Jesus time many would have lived on the bread line with little to wear and only a meal away from hunger. Food is a basic worry or anxiety of any living thing – the squirrels are burying enough acorns to cover the world in oaks as we speak. It was to those living on the edge that Jesus issues his command not to worry – how dare he? He doesn’t say it to folk filling their boots with another gross of loo rolls or ton of beans. He is assuring them of the Fathers love – for that is what is needed and what cannot be broken. How often in our world do we seek to fix temporal material need without love.

Elsewhere with the widows might the rich man and poor Lazarus and the sermon on the mount he speaks to those who have been blessed with good things in this life and calls for their hearts to be truly thankful echoing the words of Deuteronomy “do not exalt yourself or forget the Lord” for it is not yours for ever or the key to your place in the kingdom.

Perhaps this coming season we can use food as more than a fuel but a means to reorient ourselves to what matters. Perhaps we can find ways to share our blessings, to calm our anxieties and those of others. In short to love God and neighbour as self; knowing that such love has no sell by date and can be infinitely recycled and offered in recipes new and old. We have the mind and heart to do so if we allow Christ to restore our true image which is why we are here to feed upon him and let it be so.