

Harvest 2019

Tucked away in the verses we heard from Deuteronomy are two which some scholars think may have originally been a form of creedal statement for Judaism: *The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (8-9)*. In them we can see two things which I think inform our interaction with the world and our celebration of the Harvest. Firstly the freedom we have within our lives. The Children of Israel had endured slavery, and the Exodus account of liberation is central to every aspect of the Jewish Faith, something which was reflected in the heart of Christianity. At Eastertide, we recount elements of the Exodus journey from slavery to freedom as the underlying understanding of the transformation of the way in which we look at life itself. The Resurrection offers us the knowledge of liberation in every step of our journey:

You will remember that passage from I Corinthians (15:55-57) *'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*' This phrase is as much about our lives here and now, together with the way we touch the world, as the assurance of our onward journey towards the heart of God's Love. This is our freedom. God gives us the choice about the way in which we interact with the world.

The second element of the two verses from the Deuteronomy reading is the call to look at the world in wonder. We live in a world which truly flows with milk and honey, and our Faith should inform every aspect of the way in which we both interact with creation.

The passage from Philippians gives us a wonderful insight of the fulness of life if lived in Christ. *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice.* This expresses our call to constantly explore the way in which we interact with the world - the way in we live - which should exemplify the knowledge of the glory of God which is shot through the whole of creation. This glory is nothing other than a love so deep and beyond our understanding that we can only fully comprehend it in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel reading follows on from John's account of the feeding of the 5,000. What has this to do with harvest, other than a tangential link through food? Everything. The life of Faith is one which feeds our deepest needs and quenches our deepest questionings. In Jesus is the fulness of life, and in him we find the answer to every interaction which we have with the world. We are called though faith to reveal the compassion of God for broken humanity. In doing so, we have ethical choices to make, always understood by balancing the knowledge of the broken nature of humanity. I was pondering on Friday at our Communion service, the balance to be made in the current febrile nature of humanity's interaction with the planet – our knowledge of the responsibility of doing what we can to allow nature to prosper. The issues are huge. I commented in this month's magazine on the campaigns of both Greta Thunberg and the Extinction Rebellion (whose 'prank' with the fire-engine went so disastrously wrong this week).

I am with them on alerting people to the degradation humanity has wrought environmentally virtually everywhere on the planet. However, life is a balance. Globalization has reduced poverty to its lowest level in human history. It has changed the lives of billions of people, and the hard-nosed proposals which we hear about would bring this to a shuddering end. There is a balance to be struck, and I believe the Church has a moral and religious responsibility to enable this voice to be heard and live in a way which helps to bring it about.

So we are called to acknowledge God's presence in the whole of creation, together with the abundance of blessings which flow from this knowledge - in other words to care for the precious environment in which we live from A-Z. This includes our responsibilities not just for the animal and plant kingdom but also the responsible way in which we should garner the resources of the planet, together with the concerns of the knowledge of the way in which our lives impact on other people. Paul talks of the transformation of spirit through the knowledge of faith in Jesus Christ and the way in which this enables us to look at the world through the eyes of Jesus. Does this bear relationship to the wider sense of creation? Well, I think that it absolutely does, because the whole of creation is interlinked – everything has the Divine Love running through it.

Jesus reveals that in him we are truly fed with the knowledge of God's Love. In turn this calls us to consider that our relationship with the world should mirror the wonder of God's creation – a creation flowing with milk and honey; from the sights of new stars forming at the edge of the universe in clouds of wonder, to the beauty of the tiniest elements of the natural world. In so doing, we enter relationship with the Divine Life which is at the core of all that exists. Giving thanks for the Harvest is a part of this, as is care of our environment and of each other, because all reflects God's Love within creation.



Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

26 When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.' ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.' You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

Philippians 4: 4-9

⁴ Rejoice^[a] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.^[b] ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved,^[c] whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[d] these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

John 6: 25-35

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?'

²⁶ Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.' ²⁸ Then they said to him, 'What must we do to perform the works of God?' ²⁹ Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' ³⁰ So they said to him, 'What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?' ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

³² Then Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which^[a]

comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' ³⁴ They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'

³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'