

## Harvest 2017 Year A

On this Sunday when we celebrate the Harvest, it is sometimes difficult to remember that this festival is a comparatively modern one in terms of the Church of England. The familiar hymns which will be sung later, with their strains of Harvest home and God's garner in which to abide, will give many a warm glow, but in fact it all seems far removed from the world as we know it in 2017!

In fact, it was 173 years ago today that Parson Hawker, the eccentric vicar of Morwenstow in north Cornwall (and part-time merman) introduced a service thanking God for the bounty of the land, at which a loaf using flour made from the first cut of the corn was used for Holy Communion. From this first service, now virtually the whole of the western church keeps some form of Harvest celebration. Much of this was (and in some cases still is) highly sentimentalised. Yet reality has overtaken the tradition of gifts, as you will see here - where tins and packets have replaced the heaps of fresh produce and flowers which might have been seen in this church thirty or forty years ago. Although this means that we are removed further and further from the wonder of creation itself the tradition of gifts remains a laudable contribution to those less fortunate than ourselves.

So what are we to make of Harvest?

The Jewish Festival of Sukkot is the Biblical inspiration for Parson Hawker's reinvention of the Harvest, and has a double significance. Exodus talks of the agricultural nature of Sukkot as the "Feast of Ingathering at the year's end" (Exodus 34:22) *22 You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year –* and marks the end of the harvest time and thus of the agricultural year in the Land of Israel. The more elaborate religious significance appears in the Book of Leviticus and ties this to commemorating the Exodus and the dependence of the People of Israel on the will of God (Leviticus 23:42-43).

*You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*

The passage from Deuteronomy we heard earlier is one describing a beautiful land to which the Children of Israel will be brought, not just flowing with milk and honey, but one in which the landscape itself is made up of the bounty of creation – iron, copper, silver, and gold – with a reminder that ultimately this journey towards such imagined wealth if one totally led by God's loving kindness. From slavery in Egypt and a journey through a great and terrible wilderness the people are reminded that this was all brought about through God's care – water from the rock, and manna from heaven – all signs of loving care.

The people drawing up the Lectionary provide us with even more imagery from Paul who talks of increasing the harvest of righteousness, and then the Gospel passage from Luke. This come from a long sequence of teaching which, if I am to be honest, are the most difficult to both modern reader and preacher alike. Jesus speaks here with the voice of prophecy. There is sharpness and severity to his message about 'the day of acceptance of

God's rule – there is also the sense that time is running out before God's judgement of humanity. It all seems far removed from the Harvest Home.

Yet, in fact, there is a running theme to all three readings. One is an acknowledgement of God's hand in the whole of creation, together with the abundance of blessings which flow from this knowledge - in other words, we are called to care for the precious environment in which we live from A-Z. This includes our care for not just the animal and plant kingdom and the responsible way in which we should garner the resources of the planet, but the wider concerns of the knowledge of the way in which **what** we do impacts on other people. Paul is talking 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. He, of course is concerned with the transformation of our lives through faith and the way that this impacts on others, and he uses the imagery of the harvest to help to get his message across. Does this bear relationship to the wider sense of creation? Well, I think that it does, because the whole of creation is interlinked – everything has the Divine Love running through it.

Jesus has, as I said, a running theme. The foolish landowner in the parable is concerned only with his wealth and well-being, to the exclusion of others. He can't see the wood for the trees. In the passage that follows he calls all not to be absorbed by the worries and cares of this life so as to neglect what is really necessary: relationship with God. Again, this is about transformation, and he appeals to our imagination. He is not making a moral point about lilies, sparrows, or even Solomon! Jesus is calling us to consider that our relationship with the world should mirror the wonder of God's creation, because in so doing, we are entering into relationship with the Divine Love 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 of this reflects God's Love within creation.

Thomas Traherne the 17<sup>th</sup> century clergyman and mystical writer and poet imagines this wonder of unity seen in living an everyday life – in his Centuries of Meditation

I saw all in the peace of Eden; Heaven and Earth did sing my Creator's praises, and could not make more melody to Adam, than to me: All Time was Eternity, and a perpetual Sabbath. Is it not strange, that an infant should be heir of the whole World, and see those mysteries which the books of the learned never unfold?

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things: The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubim! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and Maids - strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die; But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. Amen.

**Collect:** Creator God, you made the goodness of the land, the riches of the sea and the rhythm of the seasons; as we thank you for the harvest, may we cherish and respect this planet and its peoples, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Deuteronomy 8:7-18**

<sup>7</sup> For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

<sup>11</sup> Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. <sup>12</sup> When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup> who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid waste-land with poisonous<sup>[a]</sup> snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, <sup>16</sup> and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. <sup>17</sup> Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' <sup>18</sup> But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

### **2 Corinthians 9**

<sup>6</sup> The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written,

'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;  
his righteousness<sup>[b]</sup> endures for ever.'

<sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; <sup>12</sup> for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

### **Luke 12:16-30**

<sup>16</sup> Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup> And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?"' <sup>18</sup> Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"' <sup>21</sup> So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

<sup>22</sup> He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;<sup>[b]</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. <sup>30</sup> For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.'