

Alleluia, alleluia.

Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are ripe for harvesting. Gather the fruit for eternal life.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke (12:16-30)

Glory to you, O Lord.

Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 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. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."

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?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

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. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 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! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 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! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

And at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

We sit for a time of reflection.

Of all the Christian festivals, Harvest is the one which has probably changed most in the last 50 years. In that time, more people than ever are living in cities, fewer farmers are producing ever greater yields, proportionally fewer of the world's population go hungry and, in fact, a growing volume of our food gets thrown away before it's even eaten.

Harvest festival is less likely to be a thankful, slightly exhausted sigh of relief after working all hours to thresh and dig and pick and reap. Harvest is also less likely to be a time to feast on the earth's bounty whilst praying that the stores will last for the whole of winter.

But what endures through all these changes is a prayer of thanksgiving for what God has provided, and prayer for God's blessing on the food we eat, and on all the acts of Christian service which share food especially with those who go hungry. For harvest is a reminder of how interconnected we are with God's creation and with one another - and that's why it is so important to share this Eucharist today.

{When Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy nearly three thousand years ago - it was this spirit of thankfulness and stewardship which he was trying to instil in the people. As you walk through the desert, be grateful for what you are about to receive, Moses says, time and time again - after all that time of wandering in the wilderness, God has good things in store.

As we wander in the wilderness of these lockdown months at present - keep that thought in mind. We don't know what God's promised land will look like - but there sure is one. For those who do know scarcity and hardship today, for those who fear whether their stores will endure the winter - God's promise is that the blessing of growth and provision will be even greater. }

That thankfulness, that interconnectedness, is what St Paul writes to the Church in Corinth about. Like us, this was a church in a city, not full of farmers, but of people who used their gifts and skills for a different harvest. Paul encourages them to bear fruit in other ways: by being generous and ministering to each other.

The early church was a radical place to be - as the rich were on an equal footing with slaves, and where sharing material goods was a sign of something greater - of God's grace that goes beyond measure and without price. Paul is reminding the church, then and now, that when we try to love another person in the way that Christ loves us, God blesses, God nurtures, and God's harvest will overflow.

We can nod along to those words. We can put on our rosy tinted spectacles and agree that being generous and kind, and sharing everything we own are good things to be. And then, whether individually or as a society, we fall short, we stop others bearing fruit.

More and more species are threatened with extinction because of climate change and monoculture. The mountains of waste food pile up. Over lockdown, more people than ever had needed food banks. We are not using the harvest well - and that's why our Harvest services now include times to say sorry and confess our individual and collective sins of greed and abuse, in a way that was never needed 50 years ago.

But our harvest eucharist does more than that. In our prayers, in our sharing of Christ's body in the bread of communion, in our gathering together to ask for God's blessing on what we eat and who we share it with - we are reminded of how interconnected we are. We hold together those contrasts and those changes, and ask God to work through them, to work through us to bring his kingdom closer.

The food collected today might feed someone whose name we don't know, whose story we can't imagine. We pray and give thanks for fields and farms and farmers today - yet we may never see their face or know where they are.

God uses that connection, that generosity, and blesses it to bear fruit for the kingdom. We trust that God knows each and every raven and lily by name and blesses them, just as God blesses those we name before Him today.

And just as God feeds us with with bread of the eucharist to transform our souls and bodies into a ripe harvest; this heavenly banquet connects us not just to Christians around the world and across the ages, but also to the never ending source of grace, blessing and life that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for which we give our thanks and praise. Amen.