

Sermon for Holy Trinity Geneva Harvest Eucharist at 9am on Sunday 29 September 2024

Texts: Joel 2.21-27; Psalm 126; 1 Timothy 2.1-7; Matthew 6.25-33

Will God provide?

Will God provide? This question lies at the very heart of the Bible and expresses our deepest fears and concerns. Will we have enough to eat and drink? Will we have resources to keep us warm and protect our children and families. Will we have land to grow and cultivate? Will we have the resources we need for our daily lives? Will there be peace so that we can live our lives fully? Is the world in which we live really sustainable now so that our children and our children's children may have a future?

The answer which comes from the heart of our Christian faith is a resounding "yes" but there is also a qualification. To make this a reality in our own time, we have to be willing to live out this trust in God in our lives. And the starting point to make this a reality must begin with our view of God.

For, as the theologian Sam Wells has pointed out, the root of so many of the problems which we experience in the world today is that our view of God is so limited and so driven by fear. We tend to see God as a harsh, judgemental figure onto whom we project our own narrow perceptions. Yet as Sam Wells writes:

'The problem is that the human imagination is simply not large enough to take in all that God is and has to give. We are overwhelmed. God's inexhaustible creation, limitless grace, relentless mercy, enduring purpose, fathomless love: it is just too much for us to contemplate, assimilate, understand'.

It's not a problem unique to our own time – humans have experienced it throughout history. But our failure to trust God is the root cause of so many of the other problems we then create as Jesus shows us in our Gospel reading today.

Jesus tackles with the crowd who are listening to him, the issue of their worries about daily food, clothing and survival. He invites them, first of all, just to open their eyes and look at the world around them – the birds, the flowers- all the animals and plants which were part of their daily lives. They grow and flourish without worry or toil -will not God also provide for them? He then makes the very practical point that we can achieve nothing by worrying. Finally, he invites them instead to trust God and, in that trust, focus on the things which really matter – making God's love, his justice and mercy available and a reality for everyone.

The problems come when we fail to believe this. We refuse to believe that God will provide so we hoard. As we hoard, we gradually take away that which would have provided and sustained someone else. We then start to worry that we will not be able to protect what we have stashed away so all our attention becomes focused on that. We become more worried and build defences. Then we are worried that we might

not have enough in the future so we go out to seize more so that whatever may happen to everyone else, we at least will be OK.

Does this sound familiar? It should do because it is something we all are tempted to do in our daily lives and on a national and international scale, this is what many countries, particularly in the Western world are doing, in the scramble to obtain precious resources – minerals, water, sustainable land for agriculture, oil and gas. And the consequences are dire – not only the huge environmental damage which we have wreaked upon the world but conflicts – so many of which are based on our quest for these resources.

And the reality is that the more we have become aware of the problems we are causing particularly through our actions in the wealthy countries of the world, the more paralysed by fear we have become. We are like rabbits on the road at night, blinded by the headlights of an oncoming car: seeing the consequences of our actions yet paralysed by fear.

This fear can lead to despair. Can God really provide for us in the midst of mess and chaos we have created? Have we, through our stupidity, greed and fears have put ourselves in situations which is beyond hope?

This is where Harvest Festival gives us a resounding wake-up call today. For it proclaims to us that God is good. God is merciful. As we look at the riches of the fruit and vegetables the flowers and all that He gives us, we remember that God is a God of abundance. Abundance is integral to God's very nature – all creation, which we celebrate today, bears witness to it.

Our Bible reading today also show us this truth. The prophet Joel speaks God's message of hope and great tenderness to His people. They have suffered deeply because of the horrors devouring their crops – a judgement on their own sin but still a tragedy. But God promises them abundance again – so that the land may not fear and the people may not fear – there will be abundant rain and a rich harvest. This is an image onto which we can hold in the face of the current environmental crisis – a vision of hope which God's help, we too can make a reality.

And our Psalm today, the beautiful Psalm 126, speaks of the joy of returning to the land after the grief of exile. Written in the context of the Israelites who had been taken as captives to Babylon, yet against all hope were then allowed to return to Jerusalem. The image is one of joy and fruitfulness after the anguish and grief of their time sowing in exile. – again, it speaks to us today of God's promise of hope to us.

Today – through the beauty of harvest, God is inviting us to cast aside our fears, our tendency to despair and instead respond in faith to do the really important task He has given us to do.

What is that task? No less that to proclaim and help bring in his kingdom just as Jesus taught to the crowd. This is where God's future lies for us – not in our obsessive worry and guilt.

How do we do this?

I First of all, God invites us just to slow down, to observe, to really notice what is happening in the natural world around us. Just as Jesus told the crowds to look up and see the birds and flowers flourishing round about them, we too are called to notice and to reflect what this is telling us about God.

So take a minute today to look at the flowers in church. Wonder at their colours, shapes, delicate beauty. Walk along the window ledges and marvel at the rich variety of fruit and vegetables, - their different shapes, textures and think about the many ways we can use each of them. As you leave church and perhaps have a walk today – use your senses to look carefully, smell, listen to the natural world around you – feel the texture of the fruits and vegetables you will prepare today and savour their flavours.

II Live simply that others may live: The beautiful version of the Creed from India which we have been using in Creationtide calls us to

'have faith

In God's Spirit who leads us to a meek, unselfish and compassionate lifestyle'

Tomorrow night, Anita Urassa is going to give us a special workshop to give us practical tips of simple ways in which each of us can change our lifestyles – to enable others though the world to live more fully.

III Live generously, remembering that the good things we enjoy come from God – they are not 'ours by right'. Today, as we will bring up our harvest gifts to offer, which will help all those living in precarious situations who are helped by the charity Partage in Geneva, let's remember with thanksgiving and pray that the gift we offer may bring hope and transformation to someone else.

IV Look around, notice and see where things are not just and not fair. In this season of Creationtide, we are focusing particularly on looking at where things are not just and fair because of our abuse of the environment. In our Advocacy workshops led by Blair Matheson and Mike French we are learning to see how we too, in our own small ways, we can speak out and help set things right. Come along this Wednesday for the final session to see how we can get involved in a practical campaign to help change people's lives for good.

V Be thankful – We experience God's mercy and abundance each day of our lives, sometimes in unexpected places. Today think of times this has happened to you and give thanks. And think, in turn, how you can be a source of unexpected joy and hope to someone else this week – how can you make the Kingdom of God a reality in their lives?

It may not be easy and this is because we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus sowed the seeds of the Kingdom during his ministry and it cost him his life. We're going to find times when it's hard – we face resistance from others when we

campaign for change; we struggle to change our own selfish behaviour and at times, we just get it wrong.

But in all this we have hope because of Christ. The seed which he sowed is the word of God which does not return to God fruitless. Despite our weakness, the seeds that we sow will bear fruit despite our shortcomings. The Bible proclaims from almost every page the wonders of God who brings freedom from slavery, abundant food from scarcity, life from death and joy from grief.

*'Those who go out weeping
Bearing their seeds for sowing,
Shall come home with shouts of joy,
Carrying their sheaves with them' (Psalm 126.6)*

Amen

The Revd Canon Dr Daphne Green