

Sermon	St James
John 6, v25-36	Harvest time 2013

Harvest festival is a time to thank God for his rich provision; a time to thank God for his gifts to us; a time also to reach out in prayer and harvest-gifts, to those near and far who are in need, as well as a time to focus on the spiritual harvest of our life and ministry. When the Rev Robert Hawker, in Cornwall instituted the harvest festival thanksgiving as we know it, over a century ago, he was starting a tradition that was to grow and become an integral part of the Church's year. In our own county of Lincolnshire we see first hand the grace of God, of land being ploughed, the seed sown, of warmth and water supporting the growth, until we see the harvest. But let us not forget that even in an age where there is a plethora of food variety on supermarket shelves, we are still dependent on the

harvest being safely gathered in, whether in Britain, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, or the Bahamas, or some other of country. And the balance of nature – that our harvest depends on is poised so finely, that disease, flood, drought, typhoon or earthquake can drastically and quickly affect hundreds of acres of crops. The effect of a bad harvest in one part of the world can have dramatic impact on another part.

But the lack is not on a global scale, even then. In the story of Noah, God promised “As long as earth endures, seedtime and harvest.....shall not cease”. We worship a God who is faithful to his promise.

In giving thanks to God for the harvest, for the contributions to our community larder that are so needed by people for a vast number of reasons, we also give thanks to God for the gifts of farmers and those who work on the land who have used their skill to support the growing of crops, indeed as somebody still relatively new to Lincolnshire, I am always impressed at the technological investment that has taken place to bring in the harvest – a contrast made more so when I speak to people who worked on the land years gone by.

I can remember reading in a book, about an Englishman who stared in wonder at the rows and rows of lettuces, stretching out in all directions. And he asked, just how big is this field. Upwards of 600 acres came the reply. In deep reflection the visitor marvelled, think of the seed for all that land.

I wonder if God had a similar thought, as he watched the unfolding of Jesus' ministry here on earth. True, the Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost, and would remind the disciples of every word that Jesus had taught. And God would raise up writers and evangelists to give future generations the New Testament as a rich seed bank of gospel pearls. But would there be enough seed for the world? Without seed there can be no harvest.

Now I do not believe God exercised himself on the relatively simple matter of logistics. The nucleus of the harvest had been sown by Jesus, and thereafter every believer would have enough seed sufficient for his or her ministry. There would be enough – as we see today – in each of us – but do we use the seeds wisely? Yesterday, as part of the Messy Church worship – I cut open a Melon. – a Melon, does not advertise that it has a free gift inside – but it literally has hundreds. Absolutely hundreds of seeds – if you like, a free gift from God – which if planted in the right conditions each one will grow into a plant which will produce more melons. How many free gifts has God given us!

He calls us, each one of us to think how we can use our talents to contribute to the harvest. Each one of us is called individually by God to use our talents for the good of others. Each one of us has unique

talents – it may be in making, or producing, it may be in singing or organising, it may be in being good with ideas that inspire others – each talent unique, specific to an individual but used to help grow God's Kingdom here on earth, through working in the mission field. For that is what is beyond our door, it is our mission field. And for our churches today – that is our great challenge – society has changed significantly in the past 50 years, as a Church how do we meet people where they are? How do we communicate the Gospel in a way that relates? What is that Church like for new Christians? The situations they find themselves in? How do people see us as Christians put our faith in action? Just in Louth itself, across our parish, we see example after example. Our community food bank, our credit union, our Wednesday drop in, Messy Church which for some families is their Church – that is how they do church as a family – all of which we as church, we

demonstrate our faith in action – we live one of the Bible references that resonate for me so - “what you do for the least of these, you do for me”. But what are the other opportunities to work in the mission field, ways that can engage with those who are seeking Christ?

In our Gospel reading, it immediately follows the feeding of the 5000, where the crowds had followed Jesus, and he had talked to them – it was late and they were hungry. The 5000 needed feeding, and using 5 loaves and 2 fishes the people were fed. It was a miracle.

The demands of the people were relentless, and they pursued him to the other side of the lake.

It's at this very point – to a record-breaking crowd that he says these amazing words – one of his great

'I am' sayings: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

(John 6:35)

Our gospel writer is not talking about physical food, but spiritual food.

In his statement, Jesus is attempting to move people from physical and political preoccupations to spiritual matters.

Just think about it. Jesus had just fed over 5,000 people with a couple of sardines and few tiny rolls – and here they are, the very next day, asking him for a SIGN! Yesterday’s miracle wasn’t enough to last until the next morning. It’s interesting that Jesus told them that they hadn’t seen signs, because clearly they had seen a miracle. But in John’s Gospel, a sign is something more than just a miraculous event. A sign is something that points to Christ. A sign bears witness to who Jesus really is. When Jesus tells the crowd that they didn’t see signs, he isn’t telling them that they failed to see that the multiplication of the bread and fish was a miracle. Obviously they did. What he *is* telling them is that they didn’t understand the meaning of that event.

And Jesus’ response to all this?

“The true bread is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the

world.”

Not surprisingly his audience wanted this. "Sir, give us that bread every day."

And then Jesus points to himself. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty"

I think the different responses of the crowd tell us so much about ourselves;

about the difference between what we WANT sometimes and what we NEED. So often the very thing people actually need the most is the last thing they look for –

Jesus is God's gift to us – by His grace, he has given us an infinite number of different gifts to use. To use for the good of His Church. To use in his mission field, that is beyond that door. Infact, one of the papers had a fascinating quote last week, when it was encouraging those to think about how we might work in the mission field – and it is this? To see beyond the horizon, first you must let go of the shoreline. What we must do is in relationship with Him, focus on what those gifts are, and how we may use them.

A few years ago on a visit to a Church near Manchester, I noticed over the chancel arch, facing the congregation – these words, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”. The great invitation calls people to the Lord's table, to receive the bread of life. But as they return back to their seat, returning down the chancel they see on the other side of the arch the words of the Great Commission: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”. Jesus is the bread of life; he shares himself with us, and then bids us go to share him with others, to serve him in the world. Let us pray this harvest-tide for the grace both to respond to the great invitation, and to carry out the great commission, so that the Living bread may bring life to the world.

Amen

