

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 4th October 2020 – Harvest Thanksgiving

Deuteronomy 8.7-18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9.6-end; Luke 12.16-30

Harvest Thanksgiving, these days, makes us think deeply about our relationship with the natural world, bringing all our concerns for the environment and a just sharing of the earth's resources. There are some religions, notably perhaps paganism, for whom the heart of faith is about humanity's relationship with the natural world. However the Christian faith has always sought to direct people away from seeing nature itself as the focus of Christian faith, as this can be a distraction from exploring our relationship with God. Christianity holds that God is not to be found in nature. Rather, Christians are called to learn to love nature as God himself does.

Rather like with people, it's easy to love the natural world when things are going well. But the natural world is a thoroughly mixed bag. There is indeed great beauty, and marvellous ingenuity in the panoply life, and much joy to be had from it all. But nature is also red in tooth and claw, it suffers from natural disasters, it is riddled with self-interest and extreme competition. Moreover as we are experiencing at present, from time to time it produces plagues, and sickness anyway is an ever present threat.

Undoubtedly some of this is caused by human impact, but generally it is of the nature of nature. Although it is a fascinating subject, this sermon is not about exploring the reasons for all this, rather, for Christians it is important simply to know that God loves the thoroughly mixed bag that is nature. He loves it in a similar way in which he loves the thoroughly mixed bag of humanity. It is the love that matters. We Christians are called to love the natural world, just as we are called to love one another, and to love God. And love also means respect. Unlike his Creation, God is not a mixed bag; for God is love, through and through.

This means that when we think about the natural world as human beings, our relationships with one another across the planet is one thing that really, really matters. And when we think about the degradation of our environment and the reality of global warming, the love of God means that one of the most important things to consider is how this is affecting, and will affect, our brothers and sisters around the globe. When we think about the food in our supermarkets and street markets and shops, it is the people that bring these things to us who matter too.

If we really care about all these people, and it can often seem a big ask to do so, then that is the best motivation for doing something about, for example, global warming. This kind of loving will also help us see what are the most urgent priorities. It is love which really matters, not just love for the natural beauty and goodness we love to enjoy and feel part of. As Christians we are called to feel part of the love of God, before feeling part of the love of anything else.

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This is the really life changing thing about being a Christian. Being a Christian is a journey into the love of God. As we grow in spirit, the love of God becomes more and more our guide and inspiration about everything. We are called to let this journey increasingly guide us, in all our earthly loves, learning to let the love of God guide all our thinking and actions. The love of God changes the way we ourselves love. Human love can often actually be quite selfish, and be about mostly what we love for ourselves. But the love of God is not selfish; it is generous and compassionate and tough. It's worth remembering that last one. God does tough love too.

Today is our harvest THANKSGIVING. Thankfulness is a good spiritual discipline. It helps us not to be selfish in our loves. It helps to give us perspective. It honours the often costly contributions of others. It helps us not take things for granted. It helps us treat people well. It helps us to love. Which leads to the interesting realisation that God is often thankful too. Have you ever thought that God is thankful for the part you play in his Church and in his world, even though we are quite a mixed bag. The kingdom of God is an economy of generosity and thanksgiving.

One of the themes of a Christian harvest thanksgiving, is the way it points us to the harvest of souls in heaven. There are lots of aspects in this, like judgment and forgiveness, but also as with earthly harvests, there will be thanksgiving and gratitude for the heavenly harvest. God himself will be grateful for the heavenly harvest.

In the midst of our much changed lives, it is important to remain thankful, for all that remains good, for all the ways that people are struggling to cope and helping others, for all the ways in which God sustains his people through difficult times. The Communion we celebrate in this service is, above all, a celebration of the way that God sustains us in our Christian lives. We are sent out, strengthened and sustained by the bread of Life, to love more like God does, and to be more thankful like God is. Amen.

CJ. 04.10.20