

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

Sermon – Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity – Harvest Thanksgiving

12th October 2025

Église du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède

Jane Quarmby

Every autumn, we celebrate the harvest, bringing flowers, fruit and vegetables to decorate our churches, and sing traditional songs about bringing the harvest home. The roots of this tradition stretch back through time, as we heard in our reading from Deuteronomy, where the instruction is given to harvest the first fruits of the land and take them to the priest, to give thanks for the land which grew them. It perhaps means more nowadays to those of us in rural areas than it does to city dwellers, those of us who daily see the wheat being cut, the grapes picked, and the hay cut ready for the animals in the winter. It's a bittersweet time, the autumn. The colours are spectacular, misty mornings giving way to cooler days, thoughts turning to getting out the jumpers and perhaps lighting a fire in the evenings.

But not everything is harvested in October – harvest is not confined to one season - thinking of strawberries in the summer, olives in the winter for example. And for many who are not involved in gardening, agriculture or horticulture, it can all seem a little remote. Certainly, there doesn't appear to be any seasonality in the supermarkets where we can buy anything from anywhere in the world. Unless we grow our own food, many don't look forward to the first fruits of the land, to the wonderful moment of eating our first strawberry, or spears of fresh new asparagus. But it's so important to acknowledge where our food comes from, to appreciate the effort that goes into raising what we eat.

Farming and fishing are tough industries, hard work for little return, but without it we'd starve. So, it's good to say thank you to all those involved in getting food from field to plate – or ocean to plate.

It's also essential to say thank-you to God, for giving us the land and seas, for creating the various life forms, the fertile earth, the rain, the magic of planting a tiny seed in the dark earth and seeing it put up tiny shoots, and growing into a strong plant which in its own cycle of life will seed and continue the story. Scientists may be able to clone and alter animals and fruit and vegetables, but not one can create life from nothing. Nor can they create the sheer beauty of our planet. As a species we are extremely effective at destroying life, but we have no ability to create it.

So today we say thank-you, to God.

But nourishment doesn't come to us merely for our bodies. We also need spiritual nourishment. Paul emphasises in his letter to the Philippians how important it is for us keep communicating with God, through praise and prayer, asking for what we need, in order to receive God's peace. Jesus emphasises this too when he tells the crowd that it wasn't Moses who fed their ancestors with manna from heaven – it was God. God, who answered Moses's pleas for help. If we believe in Jesus then we, as he says, "will never be hungryor thirsty." So many people are searching to peace in their lives, for comfort, for something to anchor them, especially in the face of what can sometimes be unrelenting misery and horror. We only have to check the news every day to be appalled at man's inhumanity to man. We need God in our lives now as much as ever.

So, our harvest isn't only of food. Few of us now are even involved in producing food. So, what do I mean about our own harvest?

We all come into contact with others. We all, whether knowingly or not, plant seeds in other people's minds and lives. We are assured that if we give so much a month to charity, it will improve the lives of people thousands of miles away. We will probably never meet them or even know their name, but 10 euros a month can bring clean water to a village, feed a child, give some-one medication, train someone to earn their own living or care for the animals central to their livelihood.

That's just one example of how we affect others. How we sow seeds. I read recently of an example of another form of sowing seeds, which was completely unexpected. See what you think.

In 2011, a young man training to be a paramedic, was attacked out of the blue by a 19-year-old man. One punch led to him being taken to hospital where 9 days later, medical science could not save him, and his parents had to take the hardest decision of their lives – to take him off his life support system. James was his name. He had his whole life ahead of him.

The person who killed him got a short sentence, just 14 months for manslaughter, which James' parents found unacceptable. They knew nothing about the attacker and wanted answers. Overwhelmed by grief they were contacted by someone working for a charity called Remedi, to ask if they would be interested in participating in something called restorative justice. The idea of restorative justice is to give those harmed by a criminal the chance to explain the effect their actions have had on the family and friends of the victim. It makes the criminal face up to the reality of what they have done. James's parents agreed to

take part. The man who had attacked James wasn't initially keen, but when the request came to him to meet James's parents, it made him stop and think. In his own words "They became real people. Before that I'd thought about them. But.....they become like imaginary people in your mind.... Almost like fictional characters". But suddenly they were there, real, wanting answers. He went on to say "It was almost like God himself was questioning me. I knew the truth... I had to be fully accountable, fully truthful to the best of my ability, to make sure I could help them."

He had to face those parents and their hurt. In their turn they discovered that he, Jacob, had grown up around gang culture on a council estate, whose idea of a fun night out was getting wasted on drugs and alcohol and proving his toughness to his friends. It was hard for both sides, but they went through with the meeting. The parents suspect had they not met him, they would still be floundering in the depths of bitterness and anger, and he would be in and out of prison and harming more people. In fact, he went back to school and got a degree in criminology, helped by the support and care he found from James's parents. With knowledge on both sides came compassion, empathy – and forgiveness. Small seeds sown in unpromising ground, which bore more fruit than any of them could imagine. The three of them remain in contact and pushing for restorative justice to be available more widely.

We hopefully will never be in such a situation, but we too can sow our tiny seeds in other's lives – a kind word, a friendly face, a helping hand, keeping in touch with a lonely person, giving to a food bank, opening the gates to God's peace. And in those tiny seeds, we are truly God's gardeners. We too will reap a harvest.

Amen.