

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Sermon – 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**13<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

**Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède**

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The well-known opening words of today's Gospel: "Jesus said: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.'" (And here are the important words) "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Celebration of the year's harvest can take many forms. Anthropologists tell us it is probably one of the earliest religious rituals in the evolution of human history. Some believe there may have been some form of harvest celebration during both Neanderthal and early hominoid development.

An early Christian harvest celebration was Lammas Day, the 1st of August, when a loaf of bread, made from the first cutting of the harvest, was brought to the local church: an offering for a prospective bountiful harvest.

Harvest celebrations as we know them today in Anglican and Protestant traditions only began recently, in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. But these age-old traditions have been, and continue to be, celebrated worldwide. Recently in one of the main British newspapers I came across a travel article entitled 'Ten Great Harvest Festivals in Europe'. Readers could choose between olive picking in Croatia and truffle hunting in Romania, the black lobster harvest in Sweden or grape picking in Portugal. But the one that caught my eye was grape stomping in Provence. This, to quote the article, takes place at "Les Pastras, an organic farm in the picturesque Luberon region, with suggested accommodation Le Mas du Colombier". I think it's situated on the south side of the Luberon, near Cadenet. Maybe some of you know it? Like many vineyards I suppose they're always on the lookout for new ways to bring in customers.

But what are we celebrating this morning? A little story may help. A man was out hunting in the wild woods of Northern Canada. Suddenly he found himself confronted by two large, menacing bears. He picks up his rifle and points it at

them. Undeterred, they draw nearer. There's no alternative, so he pulls the trigger. But it fails to fire! After two or three more failed attempts, he drops the rifle and starts to run. Before long he reaches a cliff edge, and there's nowhere to go. Despite being an avowed atheist he drops to his knees and prays in desperation for a miracle. But nothing happens. Sheepishly he turns round and sees the two bears kneeling down. Then he hears their prayer: 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful'.

So today, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Thankfulness is what we give and celebrate at Harvest Festival. Some may refer to today as a Festival, but I'd prefer to leave the festival part to the tourists, be that Olive Picking, Truffle Hunting, Grape Picking, or even Grape Stomping here in the Luberon. We're here this morning to give thanks. By the end of our service we'll have used the words **thanks**, **thank** and **thankful** eighteen times. And, of course the very word Eucharist means **Thanksgiving**. In our relationship with God, and perhaps most importantly in our worship, thanks and thanksgiving are basic and absolutely crucial.

I'm sure this morning as we came to church we had many people in our hearts and minds who we wished to remember. But when we think of them, before praying for any of their particular needs, do we give thanks for what they mean to us in our lives? To hold someone in thanksgiving is a good way of praying them.

Our thanksgiving should be broad and all embracing. The 13th century great spiritual teacher Meister Eckhart once wrote, "If the only prayer you use is 'Thank you', then that would be enough." Saying "thanks" recognises the generosity of the giver, our God. It allows us to use his gifts properly and to share what we have been given, to repent of our misuse, and to remember those who have not been as fortunate as we may be.

Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" He is calling us to give thanks for all the things we receive in life, not only those things that enrich our material lives - but for the very basics, which we so often take for granted, but which so many do not enjoy. Are we thankful for our health, that unlike those who will receive our gifts from this service, we have enough not to worry about where the next meal is coming from?

Our Harvest Thanksgiving this morning is not simply for our food, or, to use Jesus's words, for our clothing, but it is an expression of our gratitude for and appreciation of the whole of God's loving creation.

For me this is summed up in the Prayer of General Thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer. The original version was by the 17th century Bishop of Norwich Edward Reynolds. Written in 1596, it's claimed that it was inspired by a private prayer of Queen Elizabeth 1.

I'll close with its beautiful words in full:

*(Quoted the original version from my original Prayer Book and Holy Bible)*

*(This is the 1979 Version)*

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages.

Amen.