

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

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

**Sermon – 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

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

**Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Oppède**

*Jane Quarmby, Reader*

Today we celebrate the harvest – the gathering in of what has been planted. A big day for those who grow crops, after the uncertainty of the weather, the hard work, and finally the getting in of the crops ready for processing, storing and eating. On many farms it's a big relief and reason for a party.

Nowadays, harvest doesn't just happen in the autumn. Crops are grown year round in poly tunnels, animals raised in barns, food is flown in from all over the world, dried, frozen or fresh. We can buy strawberries for Christmas Day. People living in cities are used to having everything on their doorstep – if you need coriander at 8 in the evening in London, you just nip out and buy it.

But the downside of this is that the vast majority of the world's population live in cities and are remote from the process of growing their food. Many have no idea where it comes from, and what's involved. They don't see the fields of sunflowers, vines and corn that we see here in the countryside of Provence. Friends and family of ours think we are ever so slightly strange in growing our own vegetables and horrified that we eat chickens and sheep that we have raised ourselves.

As fewer farmers grow more crops, and people become more urban, and ever greater in number; the very soil itself has been poisoned by chemicals, ever larger harvesting machines hold up impatient camper vans on the roads, and we ourselves ingest plastics that we have carelessly thrown away – plastic is in our water, in the soil and the food we eat. However, providing we have the money in the affluent West, we can eat and drink whatever we like, when we like.

Have the words we heard today in our readings come true? Joel with his promise of plenty to eat for all; the Psalm with its words of "sow in tears, reap with joy"; Paul saying be content with the food and clothing you have because

the “love of money is a root of all evil”, and Matthew’s words from Jesus telling his hearers not to worry about what they will eat, drink or wear, because God knows they need them and its more important to strive first for the Kingdom of God. Even the Lord’s Prayer contains the words “Give us this day our daily bread”. And here in our part of the world, we have all the choice in world.

We have so much choice that we actually waste a lot of what is available to us. I read recently that there is pub in Cornwall which offers a carvery where you can eat as much as you like, which has now started charging for wasted food. People pile their plates high and leave it uneaten so it has to be thrown away. The manager estimates that they have to cook enough for 200 people to feed only 100 people. And so now they charge. In France 10 million tons of food is thrown away annually – which has a value of 16 billion euros. In my gardening magazine this month readers have written in to say what they do with a glut of fruit and vegetables. They were making great efforts not to waste it, so they make soups, sauces, jams, freeze fruit and vegetables to conserve, swap their excess with neighbours, or give their bumper crop away to neighbours if they can. Only one person wrote to say that he takes all his excess produce to the local food bank, to be given to the needy who rarely get fresh fruit or vegetables.

And all this is in a world where the World Health Organisation estimated that in 2021, 828 million people were affected by hunger.

Every year it's estimated that of the 100 billion garments produced each year, 92 million end up in landfill. There’s a movement now to recycle old clothes, to treat garments with respect and mend them rather than throw them away. But most of cheap fashion ends up in landfill.

Perhaps we need to look at what our harvest is? What do we have to show for our labour? If we don’t grow our own food, what do we contribute to the world? In our last very rural parish, we only saw the farmers in church at Harvest Festival, when they lugged in old ploughs and a big sheaf of corn. But our little community also had residents who didn’t work on the land, who brought in laptops, model lorries and other signs of their work. In a church on Coventry, a Rolls Royce engine took pride of place in church because that was where most of the worshippers worked. So just because we don’t all drive a combine harvester, we do still have a harvest – through our work, whether paid or voluntary, through our interaction with other people, through what we do for other people and how we live.

We can make responsible choices about what and how much food we buy, look at where it comes from – think about the transport costs and try and buy local, think about the amount of clothes we buy and how long we keep them for - try and recycle them when they no longer warrant space in our wardrobe, pay a fair price for goods and services, and share our bounty with others. Play our part in reducing plastic, make a fuss about it being buried or dumped at sea where it pollutes the entire food chain and kills God’s creatures. We are collecting today for Les Restos du Coeur – why do we only do it on one day of the year?

God gives with both hands to us, and an important part of all our readings today is about giving thanks to him and being content with what we have been given. I know how peeved I am when children in our family don’t say thank you for a Christmas or birthday present – how much more annoyed would I be if I gave someone life itself and they never said thank you? This service is all about giving thanks to God for the many things he has given us which we do in word and song. But Jesus gives us a cautionary note – don’t worry about food, drink, and clothing – worry about entering the Kingdom of God. Because once we do put God first, and live our lives accordingly, everything else will follow. That needs faith, to trust to that extent, and perhaps that involves some soul-searching and effort. But Jesus tells us that God knows what we need and if he can create beautiful flowers, and feed even tiny birds then what more will he do for us. So next time we say the Lord’s Prayer, let’s think about just asking for enough for today. As Paul warns: be content with the food and clothing you have because the “love of money is a root of all evil”.

And thank God every day for what he has given us – as the old prayer before meals goes – “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.” Or should we say “For what we have received, may the Lord make us truly thankful.”?

Amen.