

## Harvest Festival 2021

Joel 2:21-24      Matthew 6:25-33

In speaking and listening may God be known who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

I wonder what your immediate reaction was to these readings we've just listened to.

They are readings that abound with reassurance.

The prophet Joel speaks first to the land and the animals – reassuring the soil and the animals of the field, the trees and the vines that they will be able to give their full yield. They will be able to flourish in the way for which God has created them.

Only then does he turn to the people – reassuring them that the rain needed for fertility in a dry land will come at the appointed time so that grain and grapes will flourish for an abounding harvest.

The prophet reminds us that God, the Creator cares for the land, the plant life and the animals, just as God cares for human beings.

That in that created purpose- the fertility of the soil, the flourishing of plants and animals, the feeding of the human population – there is a God given sense of balance.

Living within that created balance offers a life without fear “Do not fear O soil.....do not fear you animals.....” but even more than that a life full of rejoicing and gladness, a celebratory life “be glad and rejoice for the Lord has done great things....be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God”

That life without anxiety is what Jesus returns to in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount from which our second reading comes.

This time, we God's human creation are guided to learn from the plants and the birds how to live without our anxious attempts to control things by trusting God. “Do not worry”

“look at the birds of the air....your heavenly Father feeds them”

Consider the lilies of the field....not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like them”

Here Jesus, it seems to me, Jesus is guiding his followers to rediscover that God given balance in creation which offers us a life without fear and offers cause for rejoicing and gladness, for celebration.

He says “Do not worry....strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you”.

I have to say, that the faith in which we might have grown up tends to give the impression that striving for God’s “righteousness” was about my being very “good”, like following the ten commandments and avoiding all the pitfalls that might be described as sins, trying to be holy in a rather pious way. That does not offer an entirely attractive a picture of rejoicing, and has the potential to replace one set of anxieties with another.

What I have come to learn is that for the people of God to whom both the prophet and Jesus is talking God’ righteousness is not a set rules, it is the largesse of God’s character, the steadfast love of God keeping promises, the balance of creation in which God holds all things.

If we look at Jesus’ actions when he says he is bringing the Kingdom of God we see that they are precisely actions that are about wholeness, wellbeing and balance: the healing of those who are injured, ill or weak, the casting out of the forces that destroy lives, the feeding of those who are hungry.

Seeking God’s righteousness and God’s Kingdom, is I think about living in ways that honour the dependence of all things on our Creator, whose purpose for all of creation is good, whose purpose is that all creation can bless each other if God’ righteousness is served. The sign of that happening is the life without fear and full of rejoicing for which we are all made.

For societies throughout history, and across the globe, the celebration of Harvest is a time when that rejoicing and time for stepping out of fear has felt real. Through the Bible the image of the celebration of a good harvest is used to sum up human happiness and well being.

So today what we do in thanking God for our harvest of land and sea, and in giving thanks for those whose commitment to the care of soil and animals enables such harvest is a profound act of stepping, perhaps just for the short time we are able, into the trust on God’s purposes in the balance of creation, a trust in God’s righteousness, a celebration of the abundance of creation which is a sign of the Kingdom of God.

And, a defiant act of trust, a defiant act seeking of righteousness and the signs of the Kingdom at a time when so much of what we hear on the news and across the media says:

Be afraid,

Worry,

What will we eat, what will we drink, what will we wear, where will we buy our petrol...

How can we change our behaviour to slow climate change and save the planet?

We live in the midst of real problems, many caused by human failure to recognise the balance woven into the creation but rather to exploit its riches with greed, by our failures to recognise that there is enough for everyone's need, but not everyone's greed, by a lack of respect for both land and sea but also those whose wisdom and hard work sustain its fertility, by a disconnection by so many in the rich world from their own true dependence on the gifts of creation, and the one who holds all in being.

Having realised these problems, there is a level of anxiety running throughout our culture, and known very clearly amongst those who are working most close to the land.

That's why I asked at the beginning what your reaction was to the readings.

We can hear them superficially as an out of touch idealistic – “trust God and it will all be alright” – which I suspect is completely unhelpful and unrealistic.

Or we can hear them as offering a different response to the real problems that our world currently faces.

Our reaction now, as through the thousands of years of the history of the people of God, can be to find strength and reassurance that God's purposes are for the balance and wellbeing of all creation – for the land, the plants, the animals and for us. God calls us to discover again and again that our best life is lived when we find in ourselves the connection with God's purposes that leads us into flourishing, helps us share in the balance of creation and is the seeking of righteousness that Jesus shows us.

One way to that discovery, Jesus tells us, is to immerse ourselves in the wonder of creation – watch the birds, gaze at the flowers. We are so blessed here, that the opportunities for watching and gazing at the beauty of God's creation is offered for our rejoicing, gladness and celebration, not just at Harvest, but everyday.

So as we give thanks to God for the gifts of Creation, and for the neighbours whose co-operation in the balance of creation have brought them to us, let's pray too for a deeper seeking of God's righteousness and Kingdom so that we can be glad and rejoicing contributors to God's purposes for a balanced and flourishing, abundant creation. Amen