

A Reflection at Harvest

Fret not because of evildoers; be not jealous of those who do wrong. For they shall soon wither like grass and like the green herb fade away. Trust in the Lord and be doing good; dwell in the land and be nourished with truth.

Let your delight be in the Lord and he will give you your heart's desire. Commit your way to the Lord and put your trust in him, and he will bring it to pass. He will make your righteousness as clear as the light and your just dealing as the noonday.

Be still before the Lord and wait for him; do not fret over those that prosper as they follow their evil schemes. Refrain from anger and abandon wrath; do not fret, lest you be moved to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait upon the Lord shall possess the land.

Psalm 37.1-9

These words might seem odd as we offer thanksgiving for the *harvest*. They say nothing about the *fruitfulness* of the earth nor about *gratitude* for it. They commend some of what we call the *values of God's kingdom*, but do not really focus on the fair and generous distribution of the goods of the earth, nor the relief of those in need. There are other Psalms focus on these themes much more directly. An obvious example is Psalm 67:

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us....
The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him. (Verses 1, 6-7)*

In stark contrast, Psalm 37 draws attention, instead, to the way in which the grass *wITHERS* and the green herb *FADES*, echoing the Prophet:

*A voice says, 'Cry out!'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are like grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.*

*The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever. (Isaiah 40.6-8)*

Here, as in Psalm 37, creation itself is *no longer* fruitful. The plants wither and perish, and they seem to do so because the *People of God* have also become listless and ‘inconstant’, following ‘evil schemes’, consumed by *anger* and *wrath*, while the *calling of God* passes them by. It is as if the very earth itself begins to wither and die when the people *lose their way*.



It is partly for this reason that the Church has designated September and the start of October as a *Season of Creation*, for us to reflect on our place within God’s Creation, on what it means for us to act graciously as *part* of the Creation of God, to be more heedful of our *responsibilities* to the wider Creation for its flourishing and fruitfulness – as the Psalmist puts it, ‘*to trust in the Lord and do good*’, ‘*to be still before the Lord and wait for him*’. Only then will wickedness be subverted, the abuses of the earth put right, and the harvest be truly bountiful as God intends: ‘*for evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait upon the Lord shall possess the land*’.

It is a more sobering kind of reflection than simply rejoicing in the beauty of the earth; but it is sobering because it takes heed of everything in human behaviour, especially in our own day and age, which compromises the beauty of the earth and the flourishing and fruitfulness of its harvests. Just as the *Harvest Festival* was invented in the nineteenth century as a way to relate the realities of faith to the experiences of a rural and agricultural people, so the *Creation Season* in our own day can help us reinterpret our harvest thanksgiving in the light of our own detachment from the land and its creative processes, and the over-exploitation of the resources of the earth, and its pollution. Until we address these tendencies too, the harvest will remain incomplete. It is exactly as the Psalmist had described it from the beginning. As we seek the renewal of our hearts and of our commitment to the calling upon us of God, may we and the whole Creation flourish and be fruitful once more.

The image shows the mosaic of Creation in the baptistery at St Jude’s