

May these words be pleasing.

I asked a student, as he left on Friday, what he was doing this weekend. He said that he was to be up at 4 on Saturday morning to help set up and run a fruit and veg stall in the market. I'm not sure that on this wet weekend he will have had a great time but I hope that he feels his work is appreciated! For today we celebrate the harvest, we give thanks for our harvest. In our minds, perhaps, traditional images of all manner of vegetables and fruits brought up, offered up at our table in church. This year more than any year in *my* life we give thanks that the food has kept coming. And not only food. This is the year when our toilets here in church have started to be twinned reminding us of the cost of not having reliable clean water. And this is the year when we as a nation have invested heavily in ventilators, a reminder of the finite gift of fresh air into a lungs. 2020 is a harvest to celebrate and be most grateful for.

How are we to respond to this great harvest? For our God is a giving God and he calls us to respond, to bear fruit. The response of The Rich Man was to build bigger barns. I taught a remarkable young man who started with us in bottom sets in his first year and seven years later was completing Further Maths A-Level, the hardest A-Level there is. I would sometimes catch him in lesson on his phone, he was buying and selling shares. He had started with nearly nothing but was now controlling successfully a significant portfolio of shares (in my lesson!). He's now in London (of course). What struck me was that he was not so concerned of being *rich*, instead of being *successful* and for him being successful was defined in having lots of money. For others it might be scoring lots of goals or having lots of children or gaining lots of qualifications. I imagine that our Rich Man is more than content as he admires his bigger barn full of grain for he is successful, yet soon he will take his final breath, and his success has gone. How are we to achieve a success that *endures* in response to God's great harvest?

A few years ago some Roman skeletons were dug up in York and put on display. What made them remarkable is that these skeletons bore the marks of multiple wounds that had healed. These were and are the only known skeletons of *gladiators* from anywhere in the Roman Empire. One even had bite marks on his pelvis made by a lion or a tiger! You may have seen the film 'Gladiator' in which the hero is commander of the Northern armies and is chosen by the dying emperor to succeed him. But before this can happen the emperor is murdered by his son who takes his place and

commands our hero to be executed. Unknown to the new emperor our hero escapes, retrains as a gladiator and eventually ends up in the Coliseum in Rome. He says these words to the startled emperor: My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions and loyal servant to the *true* emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son. Husband to a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next. You reap what you sow, 'in this life or the next', this in tune with a strong sense of justice set deep within each of us. On this *harvest* surely you reap what you sow?

Yet sometimes the gospels do not seem in tune with this justice, with our sense of fairness. Mark preached on the vineyard workers, those who came late were paid the same as those who had worked all day in the sun. More recently the prophet Jonah was angry that his time had been wasted for he knew God would not punish the city of Ninevah despite all the wrong that it had done. Think of the Prodigal Son – how unfair is it on the older brother? Last week Jesus said these words to the Archbishops, bishops and clergy of *his* day: Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. That's going to sting because we believe that you reap what you sow and the prostitutes – they're still here. And God loves them and thinks they're beautiful as are the homeless and the criminals. Is this not unjust? But to God they are beautiful and God loves them, as also the lilies, the sparrows, the ravens, you are beautiful and God loves you.

On Monday Gillian travelled to Durham, her first day at vicar school. The day before there was a meeting on Zoom for all the newbies and all those already at vicar school, and the lecturers and the principle, all on screen on Zoom. I, meanwhile, was hurrying back on my bike, due back here for Funkey at 4. I firstly went home, dumped most of what I was wearing into the washing machine downstairs, ran upstairs to get a new set of clothes from our bedroom, as I opened the door there was Gillian's computer facing our bedroom door as she was on Zoom. It'll take a while for all of us ...

Cranmer College (the vicar school) has a covenant which has been much talked about with the new students this week. This covenant is a commitment we *all* share to show the gifts of God's Spirit, to bear fruit (today is harvest) to bear fruit in showing the gifts of God's Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This, this is how we are to respond to God's great harvest.

Last week John talked of a God that was too small to fail (the text is on the website, and the recording is on Youtube). He also reminded us of huge businesses that were not too big to fail. Failure was an option for them and is an option for us when we fail to grasp not just the justice of God but also the generosity of God. The early vineyard workers failed to understand, Jonah failed to understand, the brother of the prodigal son failed to understand, the elders and the priests in the Temple failed to understand, the Rich Man failed to understand. A member of this church family here at St Marys once wrote these words for the Dodo to say to Alice in Wonderland: “Everybody has won and all must have prizes.” The Dodo is wrong and failure is an option, when we fail to accept the generosity of God, when we fail to accept that we are not too small to be loved by God. Not just that God is too small to fail but also that we are **not** too small to be loved.

This a most crucial part of all the gifts of God that we celebrate today on this feast of Harvest. We are to respond by bearing the fruits, offering up the fruits of the Spirit seasoning our lives with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is how we are to respond to God’s great harvest for none of us are too small to be loved.

The Old Testament reading is taken from Deuteronomy, chapter 8

⁷For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. ¹⁰You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.

11 Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. ¹²When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, ¹³and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid waste-land with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, ¹⁶and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. ¹⁷Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

A reading from the second book of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 9

6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written,

‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;

his righteousness endures for ever.’

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹²for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

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