

## Harvest

### **Joel: 21-27; Matthew 6: 25-34**

*'I will repay to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten...'*

(Joel 2: 25)

The prophet Joel refers to every harvest theme:

- rejoicing
- abundance
- fullness to overflowing
- restoration
- plenty
- praise
- satisfaction

Experience of the above leads to the knowledge that the Lord is God - there is no other - and that the Lord dwells in the midst of the people to bring blessing in abundance.

Throughout the UK, the harvest remains a time of rejoicing and celebration, albeit highly mechanised and now supplemented by food stuffs from around the world, in season and out of season.

Nevertheless, it is still important to recognise that we are dependent on the fruit of the earth however that fruit is harvested.

Being removed from raw production has serious effects. Not many of us plough the fields and scatter directly. It is even difficult to find people to harvest crops sown by others. What we eat appears as if by

magic, and therefore can be severely undervalued and taken for granted. In turn, the ultimate source from whom all things come, the Creator God, is pushed from consciousness, ignored and denied. Rains or lack of them; poor soil quality, drought, soil erosion, absence of worms – they become our problem to which science has to find a solution. The earth becomes ours, and everything in it. What a heinous responsibility – and what happens when our solutions don't work?

The prophet Joel poses a different view:

'Fear not, O land: be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!

...the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit; He has given the early rain... abundant rain... You shall know that I am the Lord your God...'

The people have little; they are returned exiles desperate to rebuild a nation. What they once had has been destroyed. They are having to plant all over again. It might be looking grim but the Lord promises a hopeful future. The inference here is that the fruitfulness of creation is the Lord's blessing and bounty, without whose intervention the crops would fail.

There are many places where the crops are still eaten by the locust; where there is famine, drought, war, terror and greed. But this doesn't have to be the persistent story. In God, there can be generosity,

sharing, peace, reconciliation, justice and restitution. Harvest is a song of hope in a redeeming God who can renew any situation on the earth and anything in it. Think of cuts that heal themselves. We don't ask them to – it just happens. Or think of leaves that fall from the trees and become enriching compost for the ground. The earth does its best to undo the harm that is done to it. God is not a God of waste.

Harvest is a time to call upon God to heal and restore. God promises to those who had experienced the environmental catastrophe of a plague of locusts: 'I will repay you.'

It is not just nature that God recycles and transforms but experiences too. God can recycle our mistakes to generate life-enriching wisdom; He can recycle sadness to produce compassion for others; He can recycle good fortune to produce generosity. Nothing, no matter how difficult or disappointing, will ever be wasted. Day by day we are being led towards the day of Resurrection, the day of total healing and restoration.

There are many situations in life when the day of Resurrection seems a very distant prospect and fades from view. It is normal to be anxious when the harvest fails; when we lose our job, when the mortgage repayments are overdue, when the locusts devour everything in their path and there is nothing left. I'm sorry Jesus, but the sparrows don't need new trainers for PE.

Sadly, you can't interview the birds in the trees and ask them if they feel stressed, but when you watch them, they just seem to be going about their business. Good winter or bad winter ahead, preparations are made. I don't think the birds get uptight. They can and do plan ahead, but they can't change things; we can also plan but we can't necessarily change the outcome. 'Relax,' says Jesus, 'God knows what you need.'

Worry is a symptom of insecurity, which we all share. Ever heard the phrase, 'Let go, and let God?' How hard it is to let go of all the daily worries and anxieties that flood our lives. When we worry we will never be content with what the harvest reaps.

Directly before the verses in Matthew we heard today, Jesus addresses the rich and the perils of worldliness. Verses 25-34 are his words to the less rich. Repeatedly, Jesus tells us not to be anxious. Faith is the antidote to anxiety because we are putting our trust, not in ourselves, but in the God who knows what we need before we ask – materially, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. In trying times, the temptation is often to abandon the Kingdom of God and seek to fulfil self-need at any cost. It is hard to fix upon righteousness in a world that practices greed and selfish ambition.

Recently, several people in very different circumstances have used the phrase: 'I'm taking it one day at a time,' or some variation thereof. When we hit rough patches, when the locusts invade, that is sometimes all we can do. Live one day at a time. 'Sufficient for the day

is its own trouble'. When we live like this, we tend to concentrate on the present moment, on the people and things around us, enjoying them and not wanting more. The harvest we then experience will always be enough.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

You know our needs and the needs of the world around us;

Your goodness provides for and sustains us,

and for this we give thanks.

May we be responsible stewards of the earth

and of all that you have given to us;

help us to bring your harvest home

so that all may share in it

and be liberated to rejoice in your loving abundance;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.