

Materials for Virtual Worship

Sunday 27 September Trinity 16 - Harvest Festival

The land has yielded its harvest: God, our God has blessed us.
(Psalm 67:6)

Collect for Harvest Festival

Almighty and everlasting God, we offer you our grateful thanks for your fatherly goodness and care in giving us your gifts and the fruits of the earth in through the seasons. Give us grace to use them rightly, to your glory, for our own wellbeing, and for the relief of those in need; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Readings

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And 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. 9 As it is written,

'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.'

10 He 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. 11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 12 for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. 13 Through 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, 14 while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of

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God that he has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Luke's Gospel 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' 14 But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' 15 And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' 16 Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 18 Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

Reflection

Let me begin this harvest tide with a Jewish joke:

A protestant minister, a Catholic priest and a rabbi were discussing how they made use of the funds in the collection plate. The minister said, "I draw a line on the floor and throw the money into the air. Everything that lands to the right of the line is for God; everything on the left is for me."

"That's pretty much what I do," said the priest. "But instead I draw a circle. Everything in the circle is for God; everything outside the circle I keep for myself."

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“I, too, have a system,” said the rabbi. “I take the money and throw it in the air, and whatever God catches He can keep.”

Putting some of the harvest aside for God is as old as the hills. The rabbi knows this really and the Hebrew Scriptures have constant reminders that what nature provides for us is a gift – whether tangible or in the form of money, and so it is only right – indeed it is a duty or mitzvah, to offer some token of it back to the Creator. In the Old Testament this was called a heave offering or in Hebrew terumah. In the time of the Temple the priest symbolically raised the terumah and offered it to God at the altar (Exodus 29:27). The gesture of raising it is a powerful reminder of our place in the world as God’s stewards and our gratitude to Him as the source of all life.

We continue that tradition today. At the Eucharist when the collection money is brought to the priest or minister, he lifts it up at the altar and says a prayer (based on 1 Chronicles 29:14):

All good things come from you and of your own do we give you.
Accept and bless, O God our Father, these gifts, through Jesus Christ
Our Lord.

The people of ancient Israel understood the blessing of all ‘good things’ as the product of a fertile and abundant land to be a sign of our covenantal relationship with God and with one another:
For 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, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a 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.
(Deuteronomy 8:7-8)

For without land not only has a person nowhere to live and no means of subsistence but no identity.

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In Jesus' day the people of the land, am ha eretz, were the ordinary people who worked the land, grew and watered the crops, and served others. But as lowly as they were, and as despised as they were by the higher religious classes such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, they were not the lowest of the low. Below the people of the land were the so-called 'sinners', the dispossessed such as: shepherds, lepers, the mentally ill, lepers and prostitutes.

The black radical writer, Frantz Fanon called the dispossessed black people in Algeria the 'wretched of the earth'.

Mahatma Gandhi called the dispossessed people, the 'untouchables', in India, the harijan – the children of God.

Jesus called the dispossessed in Palestine, the 'meek'; and like Fanon and Gandhi he chose them to symbolise those who would change society and the world. Jesus' said shockingly and confusingly that it would be the meek who would inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).
What did Jesus mean?

At one level the meek are literally the materially poor, those who lack any position in society. Unlike other members of his society, Jesus does not write them off because they have not been blessed by God, in fact it is quite the reverse. So, Jesus also uses the meek as to ensure those of us who are materially blessed reflect on whether we have been corrupted by these gifts or whether we are able to walk in humble obedience to the will of God.

So, how can we be members of the meek?

Firstly, as St Paul writes in his letter to the church at Corinth, by remembering to be generous, 'the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly' (2 Corinthians 9:6). When we give to charity in time or money or goods, do we do so thankfully? It is significant that St

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Paul describes giving as a 'ministry' – why? because the act of giving recognises other humans as people, made in the image of God. Secondly, to be a member of the meek we have to look deep into our attitudes to material possessions. The point is dramatically made in Jesus' parable of the barns. It's easy to apply the parable about the greedy farm owner building bigger and larger barns to large multi-national corporations, to unbridled capitalism and the dangers of globalisation – and indeed it is true that often these large companies are a major concern. But the parable is also aimed at us as individuals and our attitude to our possessions.

When we moved house over a year ago to live in Linton, it was an eye opener just how much clutter we had gathered. I expect you have gone through the process of decluttering, it's not easy and you have to be tough with yourself. Perhaps you think, 'one day this will come in useful, so I'll keep it' or 'I have had this since I was a child so I can't get rid of it now' or 'I have to keep this to show off to the neighbours'. The key question is really, where does your heart lie, what fundamentally matters: things or people and God?

Jesus said to the questioner in the crowd:

'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed: for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' (Luke 12:15)

The rabbi in the story said, mocking of himself, 'I take the money and throw it in the air, and whatever God catches He can keep.' But there is a truth here. In throwing the money in the air, the rabbi is releasing himself from the tyranny of possessions; God does catch what we offer up when we become members of the meek and dedicate a portion of our wealth to the wretched of the earth, the children of God.

Michael Wilcockson

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Hymn (Gradual)

1. Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin;
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest home.
2. All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear:
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.
3. For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall take His harvest home;
From His field shall in that day
All offenses purge away;
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.
4. Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring Thy final harvest home;
Gather Thou Thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified,
In Thy garner to abide;
Come, with all Thine angels come,
Raise the glorious harvest home.

Henry Alford

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Hymn (at Offertory)

1. We plow the fields, and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
he sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

Refrain:

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love*

He only is the Maker
of all things near and far;
he paints the wayside flower,
he lights the evening star;
the winds and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us, his children,
he gives our daily bread.

Refrain

2. We thank thee, then, O Father,
for all things bright and good,
the seed time and the harvest,
our life, our health, and food;
no gifts have we to offer,
for all thy love imparts,
and, what thou most desirest,
our humble, thankful hearts.

Refrain

Matthias Claudius
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Post Communion Prayer

The earth is filled with the gifts of the Lord: wine, and oil, and bread, to strengthen and cheer our hearts. (Psalm 104:13, 15)

Lord of the harvest, with joy we have offered thanksgiving for your love in creation and have shared in the bread and the wine of the kingdom: by your grace plant within us a reverence for all that you give us and make us generous and wise stewards of the good things we enjoy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen