

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 3rd October 2021
Harvest Sunday

Collect

Creator God, you make all things
and give us the earth and the seasons,
the rain, the sun and the wind;
make us thankful people with generous hearts,
ready to share your goodness and love
with all creation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Matthew 6:19-21, 25-33

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Sermon by John Richardson

What makes you anxious?

Is it that you cannot get any petrol for your car?

Is it that the shelves are empty in the supermarket?

Is it that you cannot get to see a doctor when you need to?

Think for a moment about anxiety in relation to those three things. Anxiety means different things to different people. What makes one person anxious may have no effect on another person. What we do know is that anxiety can be very debilitating. We also know that many of the things that make us anxious are relatively unimportant.

Today's Gospel is about anxiety. It doesn't use that word, but instead says "do not worry". If you look at the King James Version of the Bible you will find that it says "Take no thought for". Only in the Revised Standard version of the Bible do we find the word "anxious". Put those three translations together and we begin to see what Jesus is talking about.

The Gospel for today is also about faith and its relationship to anxiety. At first sight it looks as if Jesus is saying that one is the answer to the other. That if we have enough faith then we won't be anxious. But that can't be right. We know from our own experience that having faith is not necessarily an antidote to anxiety.

Which begs the question, "What do we mean by faith?" The Bible tells us repeatedly that faith is fundamental to our spiritual existence. It is as necessary to us as the air we breathe. Without it life becomes meaningless. And yet it is not some panacea for the ills of the world or the problems that beset us. It is a call to a particular way of life. It is a radical call to move away from one set of values into another - into a life of trust and obedience.

The disciples are told not to be anxious. They are told that the God who calls them to this radical lifestyle is also the creator who lovingly provides for the whole creation. That does not mean that faith will make life easier or that it will be an answer to all their problems. It means that they will be enabled to see things differently and that this new way of seeing things will change not only them but the world in which they live.

In the time of Jesus what many people were anxious about was where the next meal was coming from. Not much has changed. In many places in the world that is still the case. It is little use telling people in that situation that they should have faith. They are likely to tell you that faith is not much good to them and is not what they need.

So what is Jesus saying? He's telling us that it matters where we put our trust and our faith. Putting them in things that aren't important is a waste of time.

Today we celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving. Our celebration is a timely reminder that the creation provides us with all that we need for life. It is a reminder to us that from very small beginnings can come very large endings. It is a reminder that we should never take God's creation for granted, and that we should never misuse or abuse it.

In our weekly shop at the supermarket it is easy to forget where all this comes from. It all looks so man-made. It all looks as if we have become so clever and sophisticated in providing ourselves with all that is necessary for life. We do not need any help from God. Yet the notion that we can provide for ourselves is a false one. Our lives depend entirely on God's creation and how we use or abuse it. The more we misuse the creation the more likely it is that we will not have this abundance.

The Gospel tells us that we should "store up for ourselves treasures in heaven." When Matthew wrote those words he was referring to something which was supremely important in the time of Jesus - almsgiving. Almsgiving was considered a duty and responsibility for everyone. It didn't matter how rich or poor you were: you were obligated to give alms in order to help others less fortunate than yourself. It was a religious duty to share the gifts of God's creation with everyone. In doing so treasure in heaven would be stored up by sharing with those in need.

Harvest is a time when we think not only about the creation but about how we see that creation in relation to our own lives and the lives of those around us. It's about how we share or fail to share that creation with others. The more we share, the more we will realise how fortunate we are to have what we have. Sharing with others what we do have and what they do not have is probably one of the best antidotes to anxiety. An awareness of God's goodness and the abundance with which we are blessed is a cause for great thanksgiving. It reminds us to ask ourselves the question: "What does almsgiving mean to me?"

Much that happens to us may call our faith into question. Although faith is as necessary to us as the air we breathe, it will not answer all the questions we might ask or solve all the problems with which we are faced. What it will do is give us a perspective on life which enables us to be thankful for all that we have and all that we are. It will enable us to live lives full of thankfulness for God's creation and all that is in it.