

Doing Harvest Right!

Joel 2²¹⁻²⁷; Psalm 126; 1 Timothy 2¹⁻⁷; Matthew 6²⁵⁻³³

*Strive first for God's kingdom and his righteousness
[Matthew 6³³]*

I love Christmas! I think Holy Week is really special. I really love Easter! I relish the challenge of making some sense of Trinity. I think Pentecost is brilliant. Even Advent and Lent are challenging in a good way. However, I confess that Harvest is always a challenge. I like the hymns; I like the smell; I like the way that old people used to compare the gifts that the Church gave them from the Harvest gifts and then complain about what someone else received (just the spirit of things!); but....

I never quite know what to do or what we are celebrating. We sing, 'We plough the fields and scatter' and I know I haven't.

I know that we can give thanks for the people who do, but it somehow lacks reality and integrity.

As a teenager the best Harvest was at Fergue (they invited us every year). In the heart of this farming community stood the remote and tiny chapel and we each received a cabbage and a cauliflower for singing. We were told that when the service started the kettle was put on in the boiler in the middle of the Church and when the kettle boiled the service was finished!

I also struggle with the contrasts - there isn't anyone here who couldn't eat if they wanted to, but we are in a world where that isn't true for everyone. The statistic is still true: 9/10th of the world's population consume 1/10th of the world's resources leaving 1/10th of the population consuming 9/10th of the world's resources.

It is perfectly possible to celebrate Harvest by making you all feel guilty and getting you to empty your wallets in the cause of some charity or other. Water Aid, for example, tells us that every 7 seconds a child under 5 dies from a water-borne disease or as a direct result of poor sanitation. Now we would cough-up conscience cash for that!

I could also try to make you feel guilty about how often you worry about minor things - like what you wear or what you plan to eat as outlined in the Gospel: for some that seems so important.

If we follow the theology of Old Testament then we would have to conclude that God doesn't like the people who are starving or in need - such things are seen as a sign of God's displeasure.

If we follow the New Testament then we are told that God knows what we need - so if it isn't provided we obviously don't need it!

As I was musing on this walking the dog round the Churchyard, she was so intent on running after a squirrel she spied that she was actually totally unaware of the rat she trod on in her haste, and the rat didn't hang around long either. At the time I was particularly thinking about the phrase **strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness** and had an example of single-mindedness right in front of me - of being so focused that nothing else mattered, even if it might ordinarily have done.

To understand what we have to be single-minded about we need to get to the heart of the meaning of **righteousness**.

- ✦ The Greek word is *dikaioisune* which very comfortably in Paul's writings is taken to mean that we are declared righteous (or acquitted of our sin) when we are *in Christ*.
- ✦ Matthew uses the word more in keeping with the Old Testament idea of righteousness - of behaviour which is in keeping with the two-way relationship between God and man. A righteous person lives out the values of God's kingdom and so righteous and justice are very closely related.
- ✦ If Christian people dealt righteously with their own money and God has his tithe then the effects would be incredible: not only would the Church never have to fundraise, but it would be able to look after any who had need. If you have been ploughing the fields or scattering, then 10% of that belongs to God too!
- ✦ If God has blessed you in the Old Testament sense (and you therefore have means) or if God has blessed you in the New Testament sense (and there you are provided for) then a righteous person would act justly and ensure that those who were not so fortunate did not lack anything.

It is important to note that amidst all the negatives (don't worry, don't be anxious, etc) Matthew states this as the positive choice. **Strive** for the positives of the justice God wants in our world.

When you 'do' harvest right you get the great hymns - but all of them have a sense of the final harvest and of the judgement of God.

When you do harvest righteously you get involved in justice - and for that we have no need to fear God's verdict on us!