

If you were God, what would you do?

Deuteronomy 26¹⁻¹¹; Psalm 100; Philippians 4⁴⁻⁹; John 6²⁵⁻³⁵

You shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you. [Deuteronomy 26¹¹]

If you were God, how would you rescue your reputation?

Today we celebrate Harvest, the festival of God's provision through nature and with an expectation that we will have more than the 10% that already belongs to God to give as an expression of our thanks.

Yet, in our world, there are those who don't have enough and people blame God. If God is a God of love, why does he allow starvation, drought, disease, etc?

- ✦ Out of 2.2 billion children in the world 1 billion live in poverty.
- ✦ According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty. And they "die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death."
- ✦ 72 million children of primary school age in the developing world were not in school in 2005; 57 per cent of them were girls. Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen.
- ✦ An estimated 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS, with 3 million deaths in 2004. Every year there are 350-500 million cases of malaria, with 1 million fatalities:
- ✦ Water problems affect half of humanity: Some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water, and 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation. Almost two in three people lacking access to clean water survive on less than \$2 a day, with one in three living on less than \$1 a day. Some 1.8 million child deaths each year as a result of diarrhoea.

If you were God, what would you do?

- ✦ If you saw that 1/10th of the world's population consumed 9/10th of its resources, what would you do?
- ✦ If you saw that the cost of a missile used in modern warfare ranged between £100,00 and £800,000 and the cost but the cost of a well and a generator to serve 6,000 people was £100,000, what would you do?
- ✦ If you saw that the average cost in the UK to replace a toilet was £150 but that the cost of a new toilet in Nigeria is £10 (and that would save lives) what would you do?

How easily we point at God and blame God when our priorities show that we are just like the people in John's Gospel that came looking for Jesus **because you ate your fill of loaves!**

Jesus invites the people to do the **work of God** - of justice of love and of dignity - and the people are only interested in asking **what sign can you give us?**

The people make it clear that they want another Moses who gives **manna in the wilderness** but without the experience of the Exodus of the wilderness.

Jesus makes it clear that what he offers is **true bread from heaven** - something that fills the spiritual void - which we share in the bread of the Eucharist, but they misunderstand and think that they can cut their weekly shopping bill and so say **sir, give us this bread always.**

Jesus then hammers his point home - **I am the bread of life** and that will be end of our spiritual hungering and thirsting.

The challenge that shouts through John's Gospel is whether or not faith is self-serving and self-seeking or if it makes us more like Jesus?

One of my college lecturers was Dr Peter Hicks. He wrote a book, *The Message of Evil & Suffering*. As he concludes this exploration he makes three observations that I share with you:

- ✦ The Bible is not concerned to give instructions on how a compromising weak disciple can cope with evil and suffering. Its teaching is not directed at those who have only a vague belief in God and a tenuous relationship with him. Its foundational conviction is that, faced with an evil and hurting world, God has acted. In Christ he has come. As a result we do not have to face evil and suffering on our own, as though there were no God, or as though God were absent. We can face its evil and suffering in a totally new way, God's way.
- ✦ Here is the key to making a real impact for good in our contemporary world. If we face it on our own, the task of sorting out the evils in the world will be far too great and we shall soon despair. But we face it with Christ. We face it not alone, but as his body, the people of God, weak indeed in ourselves, but 'strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.' We face it not with the weapons of the world but with weapons that have 'divine power to demolish strongholds.'
- ✦ One of the key weapons God has given us is prayer. On our own we can make little headway against the evil and suffering in our world. Through prayer we see mountains moved.

Are we part of a faith that gives you comfort and then demands that God sorts out things that are in our power to change?

Are we part of a faith that changes us and then, in the power that God gives, we change the world?