

What Harvest?

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

*Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.
[Matthew 6²³]*

It is no secret that Harvest isn't my favourite festival – I don't plough, I don't fish and I try to avoid shopping if I can! More profoundly, I struggle with the fact that I clearly don't go hungry whilst there are those around us who do. How can I celebrate when so many cannot?

Globally, one in nine people are hungry or undernourished. 2.37 billion people did not have access to enough safe and nutritious food in 2020

In the UK 4.3 million children live in poverty – that's 3 in 10.

In this Parish 18% of people are unemployed; 89% are under the age of 60; 28% of children live in income deprived households.

I am not inclined to go back to the world view of Joel – they had suffered poor harvests because they had been unfaithful to God and then repented and God says to them through the prophet, **rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication, the threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.** Joel concludes, **you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God.** We know that there is enough for all but that 9/10th of the world's population subsists on 1/10th of available resources and that all of us, 1/10th of the population, use 9/10th of what is available. God isn't responsible for starvation – we are!

It may be my age, but I do spend some time thinking what my legacy might be. In 6½ years we have done such a lot – we have redone the outside of the Church; refurbished the Hall; and reordered the Church inside (and how good it is that we are beginning to see that vision of a warm and flexible community space becoming reality). But what will I and we have achieved if the lives of those around us are just the same? What are we sowing to reap a harvest?

We have called a **PCC Meeting** for the 21st October at 7.30pm where the major item on the agenda will be sharing together to begin to form our priorities for the Parish into the next period of our life together. I hope that you will all come and be part of the discussion: as I have said before, the Church isn't a cruise ship, it is a lifeboat and we are the crew! What sort of things might we discuss?

- ✘ How do we fulfil God's desire as stated by the Apostle Paul that God **desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth?** What do we need to do or become so that we credibly reflect our Parish where 70% are under the age of 45? How do we exercise our ministry when only 22% are Christian?
- ✘ How do we get alongside those who are struggling with the practicalities of getting through one day and dread the dawning of the next? Three suggestions:
 - That we look for opportunities to do what Paul says: **I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving should be made for everyone.** Prayer is the engine of the lifeboat!
 - One relationship we have been exploring is with **Christians Against Poverty**. This is a very good charity that helps people out of debt – we would like to offer this to the Parish as a way of doing something rather than words or the odd £20 for those in need. Is this for you?
 - **Kid's Matter** is another charity that supports families living with difficulties and tensions. Again, this gets us beyond words. Is this for you?

Jesus said, **The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.** Surely the challenge is not 'will you?' but 'what will you do?' The option? Nothing! We do nothing! We achieve nothing! We are remembered for nothing!

Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed, will come back with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves with them. This needs to become the reality for us a people of God as we sow and reap that harvest of souls. But it also needs to be the reality of those whom we meet and help – of giving them hope so that tears do indeed give way to joy. Are you up for it? Participate, Pay or Pray – let's work together for a Harvest that makes a difference.