Harvest-home

Deut 28:1-14; Luke 17:11-19

Well, the harvest is in. The Rectory produced some delicious tomatoes – but the Vicarage had a 9lb Courgette, so I think they won! But in the farms around us, harvest was already over by Lammastide, it had been so hot and dry – a terrible harvest for some. And yet rain has begun to fall, and the winter grass is growing again.

As we heard in our first reading, 3000 years ago God made a promise (and God's promises can't be broken). God promised to bless his people.

And what wonderful blessings they were: You'll be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. Blessed in your children and your livestock, blessed in your shopping and your bread-making, blessed when you come in and when you go out, blessed with safety and in your saving for the future.

But. But. This wonderful promise comes with a condition.

V2. **2** *All these blessings will come on you and accompany you **if** you obey the Lord your God:*

If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourselves.

Which is essentially to recognise that all these good gifts that God gives us are to enable us to love others – to bring worship to the Lord and support his mission in the world, and to give to and bless others in their need.

So Harvest Festival is a time of gratitude and gladness for the good things we have, the good things God has given us. But it's also an annual challenge to commit ourselves again to trusting God even when the rain hasn't fallen, to living closer to Him, and helping others.

In the Gospels, we find that God has come amongst us in physical form, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. And we discover that Jesus, as God, brings goodness and healing and blessing.

In our Gospel reading we heard of 10 people who had an unexpected and wonderful harvest. Not food, but healing.

They trusted Jesus, they pleaded for an end to their leprosy, and were sent to the Temple to give thanks for what they didn't yet know they'd already received.

And then it came. Healing, cleansing, the restoring of rotten flesh and withered limbs – the possibility of work and hunger met.
But they too were faced with the challenge of Harvest. Would they return to Jesus to thank him, to praise him, to follow him and live in his presence?

10 people received the blessing – but only one returned to give thanks and to live with Jesus in that blessing.

Jesus often used the image of the seed, not about a physical harvest, but about listening to and trusting God and a spiritual harvest.

So our Harvest Festival hymns often speak in the last verse of that final great harvest. *Raise the song of Harvest Home: all be safely gathered in, free from sorrow, free from sin. There for ever purified, in God's garner to abide. Come ten thousand angels come; raise the glorious harvest-home!*

And so Jesus' disciples – those who first heard his gospel and we who listen to it today – have another labour. Not just working for livelihood and the wealth to bless others – but also to respond to, to store up and to share the seed of faith. What we've heard of

God's generosity, what we've learned of his goodness, and the hope we've received for an eternity of joy in His presence…
What we've heard and learned and received, we are to share with others.

10 were blessed, but only one came back to thank Jesus and follow him – and he, not of the household of faith. So what of us?

Here we are, acknowledging God's goodness at harvest time. The physical blessings of the world around us, our countryside, our gardens. And the spiritual riches of new life. What will we do with them? Keep them to ourselves? Or give thanks to Jesus and share them with others? We have a marvellous tradition of the Produce Stall, sharing the produce of our gardens. Can we do the same with our faith?

Through the summer, the grass in our gardens, and on the hills, and on the cricket pitch behind the church, was parched and dry and brown. And yet after two weeks of rain it was green again. Maybe you look around your villages and think that they are spiritually parched – yet village faith is resilient, and it wouldn't take much for the shoots to be green again.

But I understand it would take months and months of rain for the aquifers to be replenished – and similarly for the deeper spiritual needs of our valley to be met.

So we must continue to pray for the rain of God's Spirit to fall on ourselves, our neighbours, our villages and our valley – that the faith of our forebears might be renewed and these village churches be bursting once again with those who are seeking God's blessing, bringing God praise, renewing their commitments to follow his commands and delighting to live in his presence.