

**Preacher: Yvonne Brae**

**Date: September 28th 2014, Harvest Festival**

**Bible Reading: Luke 12:16-30**

I was on Facebook the other day chatting with others about what we'd like to do – set up a coffee shop, a post office etc., escapism stuff.

And if I asked you what you would like to do, what would you say?

One thing I really love is going into schools and being with the children. I find it releasing and I hope for the children too it's a time when we just enjoy what God is doing rather than being anxious to achieve.

There's a song that the children sing at their schools which seems apt for today. Picture the words in your mind's eye...

Autumn days, when the grass is jewelled,  
And the silk inside a chestnut shell,  
Jet planes meeting in the air to be refuelled,  
All these things I love so well:  
Clouds that look like familiar faces,  
And a winter's moon with frosted rings,  
Smell of bacon as I fasten up my laces. And the song the milkman sings

Whipped-up spray that is rainbow-scattered,  
And a swallow curving in the sky,  
Shoes so comfy though they're worn out and they're battered,  
And the taste of apple pie.....  
Scent of gardens when the rain's been falling,  
And a minnow darting down a stream,  
Picked-up engine that's been stuttering and stalling,  
And a win for my home team.

And the chorus through all the verses:

*'So I mustn't forget, No, I mustn't forget,  
To say a great big thank you,  
I mustn't forget.*

Isn't it good today to be able to look around the Church, to look around our world and see so many things to be thankful for .... Of course we can do that every moment of the day for there are literally dozens of things to say thank you for. And that's why we celebrate Harvest Festival.

It's time for us to pause and say, "Thank you! Thank you for all those good things that have come our way this year."

To pause and to think, to pause and to thank.

Thankfulness is an attitude central to Christian belief. It's enshrined in the name of this service, so vital for us, the Eucharist, for that too means "Thanksgiving"

We really should, always and everywhere, give thanks.

Unfortunately, generally we don't. We look at the world, at all that we have to enjoy, and we take it as our right. We don't see God in it. Just as the farmer in our reading didn't see God in the good crop and looked instead to store up for himself an ever increasing number of barns. Sadly he was, like many of us in the Western world today, more anxious than thankful, keen to ensure that our needs are met above all.

It can all become a bit of a rat race...

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century there was a British monk called Pelagius, who whilst speaking to the poor said 'If you were besotted with the things of this world, you would want to surpass all others in the luxury of your house, in the magnificence of your garments and jewellery, in the abundance of food on your table, in the splendour of the carriage which took you from one place to another.

You would never be satisfied with what you possessed, but would always want more.

And you would constantly be comparing yourself with others, looking with envy at those even richer than you. Your wealth would be like **a spiritual prison**.

Oh to be poor, because Pelagius continues speaking to those who have given up and shared their wealth .

To them he says 'You have little; yet you are satisfied with what you have. You are poorer than most; yet you feel no envy towards the riches of others. To you a simple tunic is like a royal robe; a tiny hut is like a palace; a bowl of porridge is like a feast; a pair of sandals is like a golden carriage.'

Don't think the farmer in our story had thought along those lines when all he wanted to do was amass wealth. He didn't recognise God's hand in his world.

But God has always been there.

If we open our eyes, wherever we look in creation, we see signs pointing the way to the Creator, tokens of his love at every turn.... There are the obvious signs – the views from many places around where we live, on a perfect autumn day, the night sky reminding us of our insignificance, the hilarious giggle of a child delighting in the simplest nonsense. Creation is so much more than a gigantic supermarket, a mine from which we extract what we want, using or discarding to suit ourselves as if nothing has any value. Creation is not an objective “thing” to be used or abused as human kind sees fit.

Creation is, rather, part of the love song of our God who delights in creating...our God who looked at all that was made and declared that it was good.

We do forget, don't we? We've come a long way from the garden of Eden and we rarely look back over our shoulders to touch base with the Creator as we ride rough shod over his creation.

This isn't a new problem. Again and again through the Bible, God's people are urged to be thankful, to love others, to share, to care.

And we Christians know, or we should know, that this means our attitude should be the opposite of the farmers, we know we are the recipients of God's ceaseless, overwhelming generosity – and we know that this should be our own model in giving and caring for the environment. God's goodness is without limit, and so it follows that our response too should overflow.

Yet sometimes through clenched fists we hold on in miserly determination. If we open our hands to give, they will be open, to receive... we fear there might not be enough. we want to give, want to be generous...but at the back of our minds an anxious voice says “Have you made sure you're saving enough;...What if the roof fell in on your house, what if it was flooded, what if this happens or that happens. Instead of trusting that with God there will always be enough and to spare, we wonder and worry and lapse into protective meanness. Instead of rejoicing in the Lord always we can be all too prone to being anxious...Instead of living by Kingdom values every day, too many of us hang on

nervously or even greedily, like the farmer in our reading to what we've been blessed with and we seek for more, focussing not on thanksgiving but on thanksgetting...like a child who asks his friend on Boxing Day, not "what did you give?" but what did you get for Christmas?"

But today at Harvest Festival we have a chance for a rethink. We come together to celebrate all that we have received, and we express that celebration by the giving of our best, our first fruits not our left-overs, just as people have through many centuries. Harvest Festival sounds cosy, reassuring, a link with the golden days when churches were full and summers were hot.

But I'd like us to use this Harvest Festival as a challenge. A challenge to remember that we have so much to celebrate, a challenge to live lives that reflect the boundless generosity of God expressed in the Jesus who turned defeat into victory for us - you and me, - a challenge to say a simple prayer of thanksgiving expressed in word and in deed. You know that will be enough.

In fact, it will be more than enough. We'll live with one another in our communities abundantly, overflowing with grace and love shining through every action and that will spread far and wide. And so let's thank God, for life, thank God for food, family and friends, thank God for the opportunities of living in a rich land flowing with milk and honey, and thank God for being able to continue to express our gratitude in acts of love, sharing and giving without counting the cost.