

# Harvest Thanksgiving

## 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Joel 2: 21-27 and Matthew 6: 25-33

This year has been a difficult one for the rural community – as extreme weather has taken its toll on crops. The long, cold and wet winter followed by the summer heatwave means that many farmers are struggling. The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution has experienced a 66% increase in requests for help this year. With Brexit looming, and the generally precarious nature of farming, there is plenty to be anxious about at the moment if you are farmer.

But Jesus tells his followers ‘Therefore, do not worry ... do not be anxious’. We might want to retort to this command: chance would be a fine thing!

Jesus, points us to the natural world, to help us to put our faith in God. But before we think about that, we need to pay attention to the word that starts this passage: *Therefore*.

When you see that word in scripture, you need to look at what has gone before because that is what is being discussed. In this case it's verse 24, which says:

*‘No one can serve two masters: for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth’.*

So, that's the context for the passage we heard and the theme of where our loyalty lies is the controlling idea.

Are we loyal to God and his Kingdom or does our loyalty lie with mammon? – which means our possessions.

Jesus goes on to point us to the natural world: He points out that along with the birds of the air and the plants in the field, our lives have been given to us by God – so it follows that if God provides for what he has created in the natural world, why will he not provide also for us?

So, in theory, we should be able to lay down our anxiety about how we are going to live. I know it can be very hard.

The place to begin for Christians is where Jesus begins – with the Kingdom. If the increase of God's kingdom is our primary loyalty, then it will make other choices so much easier to make. The Kingdom of God is our yardstick against which we measure our actions and our behaviour.

So, if we have chosen which master we are going to follow (v24) then that will set the course for our life.

We will refuse to be engrossed in our own concerns, by *seeking first* the things that concern God and the furtherance of his Kingdom. We will not be eaten up by worry about the things we need both now and in the future because we will know that God has a track record of providing for us what we need.... when we need it.

Harvest time gives us an opportunity to thank God for the bounty of creation and for those who work to produce food, be it in the allotment, food processing industry or on the farm.

Harvest time gives us opportunity to review our relationship with our possessions. I believe Christians should work towards living simply. We should guard against the instinct to hoard and try and be generous with our own possessions. Having much also disinclines us to be generous. Poorer people tend to be more generous than rich ones.

Harvest time invites us to consider our stewardship of the earth's resources and how we can preserve the planet for the benefit of the whole created order.

Harvest time reminds us to give to those in need – both near and far and to work for the justice that means that everyone's needs are met fairly.

Thanks be to God for his generous gift.