

SERMON – 27/9/20**'Abundance'**

Psalm 67:1-7

Galatians 5:22-26

“The land has produced its harvest; God, our God, has blessed us. God has blessed us; may all people everywhere honour Him.” (Psalm 67:6-7)

As we pause this morning to give thanks for the harvest of the land I want to encourage you to think about the theme of abundance. We have focussed so much in recent days on what we are *not* going to be able to do in the coming weeks and perhaps months that most of us have probably felt our horizons closing in on us again, so today I would like us to open the window and look *out*; I would like us to stand outside and look *up*; I would like us to lay our own situation to one side for a bit and, as Jesus put it, 'consider the lilies of the field'.

This world is absolutely teeming with life. At this time of year it is evident to us in the fields where various crops are being harvested, in the hedge-rows and on the trees as berries and fruits ripen in all the splendour of their colours, from apples and brambles to rowans and elderberries. At other times of year it can be seen as the snowdrops and daffodils push their way triumphantly through the frozen ground to announce life after death; or again in the fields and hillsides full of lambs and the fledglings emerging from their nests. There is something powerful and unstoppable written into the DNA of all living things that repeats the Lord's command from the very beginning: 'Go forth and multiply!' And so the abundance reveals itself and the world itself is fed.

Of course farmers and gardeners know that while there is an incredible abundance of growth in what we plant ourselves, the weeds also grow abundantly and the insects and bugs also multiply at an amazing rate – think of the seeds of the willow herb and the dandelion blowing in the wind; try to eradicate ground elder from your flower bed; and where do all those slugs and flies come from?

In these days we are all too aware that coronavirus is programmed with exactly the same ability to reproduce itself abundantly, and it is of the very nature of cancer cells to multiply too quickly for their own good (or that of

their host). Abundance is one of the world's greatest problems as well as its greatest blessing. The spiralling of human population in parts of the world that struggle even to sustain what is there already provides one of the greatest challenges of our times. We celebrate the abundance of the harvest in our land but how often do we consider the catastrophe that would befall us if the harvest failed?

We have been marking Creation Time this month in our services and raising questions about how we can live more sustainably and take greater care of the world God has entrusted to us. As human beings we have too long regarded it as our right to exploit and abuse the abundance of the earth's resources without recognising the crucial balances that God ordained for the good of all. In our greedy quest for profit we have sometimes overstepped the mark and we are reaping what we have sown, albeit not always in the ways we expected.

But there is abundance in much more than the natural world. Although our psalm this morning is a song of harvest thanksgiving, it also reveals that abundance is of the essence of God's creation in every area of life. God blesses us with abundance in the harvest but the psalmist helps us to see that God also offers us blessing through an experience of abundant mercy and kindness, through an invitation to accept His freely-offered guidance and salvation, through the abundant order that comes from His perfect justice.

God offers us abundance in *all* His dealings with us. In the letter of James we see that 'if any of you lack wisdom you should pray to God who will give it to you, because God gives *generously* and graciously to all.' (James 1:5) We pray regularly for our daily bread, but how regularly do we pray for wisdom and guidance. God is just as liberal with the revelation of His will as He is with the fruits of the harvest, but we are less willing to seek His will than we are to seek food to eat.

With God there is also forgiveness – in another psalm we read that 'as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our sins from us' (Psalm 103:12) – you don't get much further than that, so God's forgiveness too is abundant, and it is not inevitable that we will make the same catastrophic mistakes and wrong choices again and again as individuals or as a society. When we cry out to the Lord, we will be lifted from the mud and mire that

is so often of our own making. As Isaiah writes: 'Let us turn to the Lord our God; He is full of mercy and will freely pardon.' (Isaiah 55:7)

Or again, God has poured out the Holy Spirit – lavishly, generously, filling us to overflowing with what Jesus called life 'more abundant' (John 10:10) We ask God often enough for material things to satisfy our worldly cravings and time and again we have found an abundance of good things. But when did we last ask God to pour out His Holy Spirit upon us?

It is in fact the only appropriate and adequate response to God's abundant provision for us in creation and in the spiritual realm that we allow that abundance to flow into us and through us. It must issue forth in praise to God, as we see in today's psalm – 'May the peoples praise you, O God, may all the peoples praise you' – and what cause we have (even in these dark days) to sing praise to God our Creator and Provider, the Lord of the harvest and the One who is merciful and kind to us, who reveals His will to us and guides us into the paths of peace, who has won salvation and perfect justice for us. Praise the Lord!

But our response must not only be with our lips but with our lives. In our second reading we were reminded of the harvest of the Spirit in the lives of all who will receive Him – the beautiful fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. What joy there is in the heart of our heavenly Father when there is an abundant crop of that harvest in our lives, and what blessing there is for those around us in whatever context that fruit is evident.

Let the fruit of the abundant seed that God sows in the world also be abundant in us and through us, so that we may echo the words of the psalmist and see the fulfilment of them in our time. Listen to the words – they are words of abundance:

- that the *whole* world may know God's will (how vital that is in these uncertain times)
- that *all* nations may know God's salvation (may many find eternal hope in God when other helpers fail)
- that *all* the peoples may praise the Lord
- that *every* nation on earth may be guided in the right path
- and ultimately that *all* people everywhere may honour God.

“The land has produced its harvest; God, our God, has blessed us. God has blessed us; may all people everywhere honour Him.”

So my friends in these days when we are perhaps tempted just to pull the duvet over our heads and hibernate till all this is over, God has work for us to do. So let us look out and up and around and let us rejoice in all that God has done so marvellously and in all that He has given so abundantly, and let our response of praise and of action be as abundant as the harvest and the fruit of the Holy Spirit be seen in us and give reason to all around us not just to see our good deeds but to glorify our Father in heaven, that all people everywhere may honour the Lord.