

Parish of Central Exeter

Evening Prayer

17th Sunday after Trinity 4 October 2020

Welcome everyone.

We continue to celebrate Harvest this evening. The liturgy is taken from the Green Christian website.



Preparation

As I prepare this service it is a sunny clear autumn morning. It is an easy time to be positive about life, fruitfulness and harvest. But by Sunday the weather is likely to have changed, and it may be dismal, dreary and wet. The news about Covid 19 may or may not have taken any step for the better. The possibility, even probability of having to spend more months under restrictions creates unease and worry. We long for some form of consistency, but the future will not be a return to the past.

And yet 'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.' (Gen 8:22)

Harvest is one of those occasions when we can look back rightly to the continuity and regularity of the seasons and the natural world, recognising our own place within it, and also look forward rightly to how we can appropriately exercise our stewardship of the world's resources to sustain this living planet.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth (Isaiah 40:28)

We begin our service with 'Father Lord of all Creation'. Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyguLv5A_b4

Opening Statement

Creator God,
breathing your own life into our being,
you give us the gift of life.
You placed us on this earth
with its flowers and fruits,
minerals and waters,
living creatures of grace and beauty.

At harvest time
the earth reaches the peak of its fruitfulness.
It depends on us to praise you
by harvesting its goods in ways
which ensure there will be harvests in the future.

You gave us the care of the earth.

Today you ask us: "Where are you? What have you done?"

Silence.

Psalm 65

You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.
May the pastures of the wilderness flow with goodness,
and the hills be girded with joy.
May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep;
and the valleys stand so thick with corn
that they shall laugh and sing.

Prayer for Forgiveness

When we are unkind to people,
and forget they are God's children
When we are careless with the beasts
and forget they are God's creation;
When we ill-treat the land,
and forget it is the splendour of God
Forgive us, O God of love, and reconcile us to yourself,
to one another and to the Creation.

Teach us, that the earth and all its fullness is yours,
the world and those who dwell in it.
Remind us that your Son too
enjoyed the fruits of harvest in Galilee
And joins us now as we celebrate your good gifts together.
Call us yet again to safeguard the gift of life,
now and forever.
Amen.

We listen to a Song

'Look at the World', music by John Rutter, sung for us here by the choir of the Catholic Fellowship, Djakarta, Indonesia. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YU8jridblwg>



The Lord's prayer

God, lover of us all, most holy one.
Help us to respond to you.
To create what you want for us here on earth.

Give us today enough for our needs.
Forgive our weak and deliberate offences,
just as we must forgive others
when they hurt us.

Help us to resist evil and to do what is good.

For we are yours, endowed with your power
to make our world whole.

Amen.

(Lala Winkley)

Reading Matthew 21: 33-46 NIV

The Parable of the Tenants

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.



The Parable of the Wicked Tenants. Illustration in the Codex Aureus of Esternach, c 1050

German National Museum, Nuremberg

Reflection

This passage continues on from the parable of the two sons which was the subject of last week's Night Prayer. It's a strange story with a standard interpretation being that this is all part of the growing tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. They are the tenants whose duty is to pay their dues to the landowner (God), (appropriate at harvest time!) and they are not doing so. Messengers (the Old Testament prophets) are sent to get them to toe the line, but they are dismissed. The heir (Jesus) is even killed. So what will happen? Their come-uppance is assured, and the tenancy of the vineyard will pass to different tenants (The Christian Church).

So the Church becomes the true tenant in God's vineyard (the Earth), and we have to make sure we are proper and faithful tenants of creation. End of appropriate sermon for Harvest time.

This may be Matthew talking, but how much of this is what Jesus actually said? This parable features in Mark and Luke as well, and also in the gospel of Thomas. This latter 'gospel' was discovered in the Nag Hammadi cave in Egypt in 1945. It is not a narrative of Jesus's life but a collection of his sayings. There is uncertainty between scholars about when this gospel was actually written. Some favour a very early date in the middle of the first century, others later in the second.

But both the gospel of Thomas and Luke give a more pared down version of the parable than Matthew or Mark, and perhaps these are closer to what Jesus actually said. Certainly verses 33, 34 of Matthew are linked closely to Isaiah 5: 1-2, and v 42 to Psalm 118: 22-23, and have the feeling of additional explanations to back up Matthew's desired interpretation.

So let's take the basic story. There the message seems to be that violence against those with power is likely to end in disaster. There is a continuous undercurrent in the Gospels of how the Kingdom of God works, and of its difference from the political structures of the day. The Kingdom of God is not one that uses violence to achieve its aims. If we as the tenants try to organise violence against the powers of the world to further the Kingdom, the result will be our own destruction (by those powers) or our self-destruction by abandoning our role as tenants. A valuable reminder not just to the early followers but also to the church itself when it became the established religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century.

The Gospels view the Kingdom as something in our midst which through God's grace expressed in Jesus we can all discover, and which creates a corner stone that supports a different building to those built on power, which earthly kingdoms normally are.

We all need to check from time to time which kingdom's drum beat we are following.

We listen to a song

This is 'Inspired by Love and Anger' - words by John Bell, and set to a traditional Irish melody. This version is from the Church of St Cuthbert's, Wells and Wookey Hole, Somerset. The words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMH1-Bu-7U>

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that Creation is a gift of God,
an expression of our Creator's goodness.

We believe that as human beings we are part of this creation
and that we share in a special way in the creative power of God.

We believe that the resources of our land and waters and air
are precious gifts from our Creator,
to be used and looked after with loving care.

We believe that there is a rhythm to God's creation, like a drum beat;
When we lose the beat, or the drum is damaged, the music is out of tune.

(Pacific Women's 'Consultations on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation'.
from *Prayers and Poems, Songs and Stories*, WCC 1988.)

Prayers at harvest time

For rain and sun and insects to pollinate crops; for farmers who work with nature and preserve the beauty and diversity of God's creation; and for wild creatures which enjoy the harvest of berries, nuts, grains and seeds.

We give thanks, O God.

For the soil, rich and precious, home to countless living creatures which maintain fertility and give us food and life.

We give thanks, O God.

For growing awareness that we all depend on the earth for our daily food and fuel; and for the increasing numbers of people who want to eat local food and have closer links with food producers.

We give thanks, O God.

For wisdom to live in ways that will slow down climate change and keep the rains falling in their due season.

O Lord hear our prayer.

For caution in manipulating the building blocks of life in transferring genes between species.

O Lord hear our prayer.

For grace to recognise we are part of God's creation with responsibilities to care for God's earth and our fellow creatures, including farm animals both during their lives and in their deaths at abattoirs.

O Lord hear our prayer.

Bring peace to the killing fields of war, turn scorched earth to green, so that people can sow their seeds and harvest their crops and live in harmony with their neighbours.

Lord send forth your Spirit.

Bring justice to those crushed by debt, forced to grow cash crops for us to consume, tempted to waste fertile land growing drugs and tobacco and denied access to land for growing their own food.

Lord, send forth your Spirit.

Send us out into the world, in service to God's creatures, as disciples of Jesus who blessed bread and wine at the Last Supper – bread which earth has given and human hands have made and wine, fruit of the vine and work of human hands.

Lord, send forth your Spirit.

Meditation

See yourself as part of the creation, not as a consumer of that place. Have God's eyes for that place, love it like God loves everything.

Zoom out from the single place to the context of the whole world.

Work for transformation and for change through love and hope not from duty. For hope to flourish it needs to be sustained and rooted in God's love.

(Phil Kingston In Requiem for Extinct Species)



Thanksgiving.

Finally, we offer grateful thanks to our God for the fruits of the earth, the down-coming of the rains, the ripening warmth of the sun and the seeds and fruits of every year.

May we always walk gently upon this earth, in right relationship,

- nurtured by your Love
- taking only what we need
- giving back to the earth in gratitude
- sharing what we have
- honouring all with reverence
- reconciling and healing
- mindful of those who will come after
- recognising our proper place as part of your creation.

Grant us the strength and courage, we pray,

for such radical transformation into your Kingdom.

Then we, too, with the very stones will shout, "HOSANNA"!

Blessing

May the Father,

who fed his children with bread and honey in the wilderness,
strengthen you in your pilgrimage to the Promised Land. **Amen.**

May the Son,

who gave his flesh for food and his blood for drink,
keep you in eternal life and raise you up on the last day. **Amen.**

May the Holy Spirit,

who leads us into all truth,
help you discern the Lord's body
and empower you to proclaim his death until he comes. **Amen.**

Reflective music

Our closing music is 'O nata lux', a short early hymn usually sung on the commemoration of the Transfiguration during the monastic office of Lauds, which was at daybreak. Music by Thomas Tallis, sung here by The Sixteen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp5hrYAYJNs>

O nata lux de lumine
Jesu redemptor saeculi
Dignare clemens supplicum
Laudes preces que sumere

O Light born of Light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
with loving-kindness deign to receive
suppliant praise and prayer.

Qui carne quondam contegi
Dignatus es pro perditis
Nos membra confer effici
Tui beati corporis

Thou who once deigned to be clothed in flesh
for the sake of the lost,
grant us to be members
of thy blessed body.

Thanks

To everyone for following these services.

