

HOMILY FOR HARVEST PRAISE AT GW: 1ST OCTOBER 2023 (based on Deut.8:7-18 & James 5:1, 4-8)

Harvest - a season both of thanksgiving and food for thought

Complacency and the failure to heed warning signs - faults leading to climate disasters that affect the whole world. As we gather today in joyous thanksgiving, we might be forgiven for thinking that we are not complacent - we're not taking for granted either the hard work of our farmers or God's gift of conditions conducive to growth and harvest. Yet it's a narrow view if we ignore what's going on in the rest of the world. Our readings, set in far off lands and centuries ago, serve as a warning and a reminder.

The subject of the passage from Deuteronomy is the wealth of the land promised to the Israelites in exile. The writer paints a wonderful picture of a well-watered and fertile land where they will lack nothing. And yet it is portrayed as a future threat to their faith should they lapse into complacency, once God has delivered them to this land of plenty. Remembering God and his covenant is a central theme in Deuteronomy. It's a very human failing to forget to be grateful when things are going well. The Israelites are to remember that it was God who brought them through the wilderness, fulfilling the promise made in his covenant with their ancestors. God doesn't forget, but sadly human beings do.

The reading from James brings us forward a number of centuries and reveals how little had changed. Like our Old Testament reading, it focuses on the complacency of the rich who have it all. That warning in Deuteronomy is shown to have been well-founded, for the selfish rich treat their labourers atrociously. James is lashing out against the exploitative behaviour of wealthy landowners, who not only hoard purely to meet their own needs, but also withhold the wages that are due their workers. Luxury purchased at the expense of the starving poor is tantamount to killing them. And don't we witness much the same happening in the world today? Deforestation, for example, not only affects the climate, it destroys people's lives - those in power and who benefit simply turn a blind eye. James goes on to encourage patience, implying that the exploiters will in due course be condemned, thus bringing an end to the misery of the exploited. And the assurance of early

and late rains tells us that God remembers his covenantal promise, even though that benevolence is clearly not reciprocated by those who benefit from it. Historically and globally, the time of harvest has become not only an opportunity to be thankful, but serves also to remind us of our own part in that covenant with God, helping us to understand how our actions, not God's, contribute to crop failure and climate chaos. God creates; humans destroy.

We here are so fortunate to live in an agricultural community, alongside those who cultivate the land. It gives us a greater understanding of their feelings of fear and relief, the impact of good and bad harvests on our farmers. And so we come together at this time every year for a number of reasons: traditionally to appreciate God's gift of creation and the work of our farming neighbours, but increasingly also to acknowledge and understand humankind's role in climate disasters; and of course to give our thanks to God, and share the fruits of the season.