

Sunday 10th October 2021 – Harvest Festival

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

1. Giving Thanks:

Introduction:

- If you wanted to say thank you to someone would you give them a fresh bunch of flowers, or a wilting weed you picked from the hedge?
- If you wanted to say thank you to someone would you give them a new, complete box of chocolates, or a few leftovers sweets in a crumpled packet?
- If you wanted to say thank you to someone would you give them nicely wrapped gift, with bow and ribbons, or hand it over in a Tesco carrier bag?

We would general choose to give the better gift of the two. It makes the thanks we want to express more genuine, more real. The others give a sense of it being an after thought, an insincere anything will do approach.

Genesis 4: Cain & Abel:

One of the earliest stories in the bible illustrates this, from Genesis 4. Cain & Abel were the sons of Adam & Eve, and they were both farmers. Cain, we are told, grew crops, and Abel kept flocks (perhaps sheep & goats). In the story they brought gifts, or offerings, to God.

Cain brought ‘some of the fruits of the soil’ (v3) whilst Abel brought ‘some of the firstborn of his flock’ (v4). The difference between them was that Abel gave from his ‘firstborn’, whereas Cain simply gave ‘some’. God’s response reflects this difference:

The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour (v4-5)

Deuteronomy 26:

Our reading from Deuteronomy 26 encourages us all to do the same for God: *Take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce (v2)*

The first fruits were the best, the pick of the crop; they were certainly not the leftovers. It then goes on to say:

Set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God (v4)

These first fruits were to be brought to God as a thank you gift. As genuine act of thanksgiving that cost the people - they gave their best crops away!

What sort of gifts, what sort of thankfulness do we bring to God? Do we give him the best of our crops, our time, our abilities, and our resources? Or do we give him the leftovers, the bits we can do without? Is thankfulness to God a priority or an afterthought for us?

2. Living Gratefully:

When you receive a gift from someone how do you respond? Would you destroy a bunch of flowers before their eyes because you didn't like them? Would you melt their box of chocolates down to make a chocolate sauce for the pudding? Would you jump on a present and flatten it just for the fun of it? I guess the answer to all these, would be no. We would accept the gift graciously and thankfully.

Some of our Eucharistic prayers (part of the Communion service) have these words in the opening section:

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places, to give you thanks and praise ...

They encourage us to be thankful to God, at all times and in all places. As St Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians:

Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess 5:16-18)

Deuteronomy 26:

Our reading from Deuteronomy 26 goes on to remind us of the good things God gives us:

Rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given you and your household (v11)

So how do we treat all the good things God has given to us? Do we rejoice in them? How do we treat the world God made? Do we rejoice in it?

Well, let's be honest with ourselves for a moment:

- We wouldn't cut something down just because we didn't like it – would we?
- We wouldn't melt down the earth's resources because we think we can make something better – would we?
- We wouldn't destroy the natural life around us just for the fun of it – would we?

The truth is that sometimes we do! We misuse the gifts God has given us. Our response to God's generosity is too often expressed through exploitation,

pollution, the extinction of species and environmental destruction. What kind of thanks is that to offer to God?

We must do better, as our reading says – *rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given you.*

Reflection & Discussion:

- What is your favourite harvest hymn/song – why?
- If you wanted to say thank you to someone what would you do, how would you express your thanks?

Read - Deuteronomy 26:1-11

- What is the writer (traditionally Moses) encouraging the people to do?
- Why is it important?

Read – Genesis 4:1-7

- What had Cain not done, such that his offering was not accepted?
- Is thankfulness to God a priority or an afterthought for us?

Read – Philippians 4:4 & 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- What is St Paul encouraging the early Christians, and us, to do?
- Do you find this easy to do? If not – why?

Finally, read - Deuteronomy 26:11

- Do we take the things God gives us for granted?
- How should we treat all the good things God has given us?
- What does this say to us about the way we care for the world?

Prayer:

Father God, we thank you for all the good things you have given to us through creation.

Help us to be better stewards of the things you have given us, so that our care for your world reflects our thankfulness.

Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.