

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 5 October 2025 - The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity (Harvest)

Lectionary Readings (*depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on*)

Deuteronomy 26.1–11; Psalm 100; Philippians 4.4–9 or Revelation 14.14–18; John 6.25–35

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Canon Dr Robert Mackley, Incumbent - Vicar, St Mary the Less, Cambridge

The former Conservative politician Douglas Hurd confessed that when he was foreign secretary and travelling overseas, he couldn't fall asleep on flights because he believed that it was only his personal willpower that kept the plane in the air! He knew it was irrational but still couldn't stop himself.

Obviously a plane flies regardless of passenger willpower. In the same way, crops grow or don't grow in fields, animals thrive or don't thrive on farms, regardless of the farmer's willpower and thoughts. A farmer cannot make barley grow by thinking it!

The work of a farmer is to prepare the earth and sow seeds and help nature out with a bit of watering if it doesn't rain, but the farmer cannot do the growing. It may sound an odd thing to say but strictly speaking the work of the farmer is not to grow crops. A farmer standing in a field staring intently at the oats with every muscle straining and eyes narrowed in concentration to try and make them grow is a comic sight not a sound agricultural strategy...

But something similar is happening in our Gospel reading today. The people ask Jesus what is the work of God they must do and he answers by telling them that the work they must do is to believe in the one whom God has sent, which is to say, Jesus.

Yet how is believing a work? Should we also stand in church staring intently at the cross or altar with every muscle straining and eyes narrowed in concentration to try and believe in Jesus more? Will that work? Is that how belief works? Can we make ourselves believe more in that way?

Not really. We can and should ask God to increase our faith, but it is a gift from God not something we can strain at. Some Christians do manage to make a work out of their faith, anxiously worrying if they believe enough. Those speaking with Jesus in our Gospel today might be doing something similar: they want to be working hard, to in some sense 'earn' God's love and their relationship with him and so they anxiously ask Jesus what work they need to do. 'How do we justify our existence today, Lord?'

Jesus' answer to their question is like most of Jesus' answers to questions in the Gospels: it's not really an answer because the question is starting from the wrong place. It's like the person who is being asked for directions, who says: 'if I wanted to go there,' 'I wouldn't start from here.' So, what do we need to do? We need to trust in God. The 'work' of God, which isn't a work at all, is simply to trust in him, to allow him to love us. It is not something to strain at, to urge to grow with all our might but rather the reverse: something to relax into, to let go of the straining and allow God to do his work. 'Lord, increase my faith; Lord, increase my trust' is all we need to say. After that it is God's problem.

As the church celebrates Harvest today, we pray for those who make it possible for us to eat – for those who work on the seas and land, those who manufacture and distribute food – and we pray too for those who have nothing to eat, for a more just distribution of the good gifts of creation, that none may go hungry and all may be satisfied. Yet perhaps just as profound a task at harvest is to be made to stop and look at animals and crops. No matter how hard we strain our minds we can't make them grow by our willpower. That's God's job. He, who is the life within and beyond and behind all things, makes plants and animals and people live. We don't.

For God is above all things the giver. He sustains us and the cosmos in life like a singer sustains a note, pouring forth existence in boundless abundance and demanding nothing in return. God is not stressed or overwrought but rather delights in being himself and giving himself, as we know from the mere fact that we exist right here and right now.

How much less anxious, how much less stressed would we be if we simply let God be God and asked him for nothing more than the gift of faith and trust? Or, as the Lord puts it so much more beautifully this morning, 'Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you'. Which the Son of man will give you. Not the Son of man might give you or you must persuade him to give you, or you must earn from him. No, the food that the Son of man will give you.

So, this harvest Sunday, let us pray: Lord, give us this food, give us yourself, give us this faith and trust; give it to us this day and always. Amen.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Let us pray for the church and for the world and let us thank God for his goodness.

For Dagmar, our Acting Bishop and for an increase in vocations to the ordained ministry, that more labourers may be called into the plentiful harvest, let us pray.

Silence.

Lord, hear us...

For every Christian person, that learning from creation, we may allow God to work in us and grow in our faith and trust in him, let us pray.

Silence.

Lord, hear us...

For the world, that there may be a more just distribution of the good gifts of creation, that none may go hungry and all may be satisfied, let us pray.

Silence.

Lord, hear us...

For our stewardship of creation, that we may tread lightly on the earth, that we might renew the soil, clean the seas and value the work of farmers and those who fish, let us pray.

Silence.

Lord, hear us...

For all who live in a world of scarcity and lack, for all who cannot see the beauty and abundance of God, and for all who suffer, among them...let us pray.

Silence.

Lord, hear us...

For the final harvest of all things, that God may gather his people from east and west, from north and south and raise us up with all the faithful departed on the last day, let us pray. Among the recently departed let us recall in God's presence...and...whose anniversaries of death fall at this time.

Silence.

Lord, hear us...

Merciful Father...

Suggested hymns/songs

From New Hymns & Worship Songs:

- 8 All that I am, all that I do
- 46 Dance and sing
- 50 Fair waved the golden corn
- 59 Fill your hearts with joy and gladness
- 63 For the fruits of his creation
- 64 For the healing of the nations
- 87 God, whose farm is all creation
- 134 Inspired by love and anger
- 137 James and Andrew, Peter and John
- 222 Praise, O praise our God and King
- 263 Think of a world without any flowers
- 269 This world you have made
- 290 Who put the colours in the rainbow?

From the Celebration Hymnal for Everyone:

- 136 Come, ye thankful people come
- 178 For the fruits of his creation
- 217 God is working his purpose out
- 306 In the earth a small seed is hidden
- 615 Reap me the earth
- 713 The seed is Christ's
- 782 We plough the fields and scatter

From the New English Hymnal:

- 259 Come, ye thankful people come
- 260 Fair waved the golden corn
- 261 To thee, O Lord, our hearts we raise
- 262 We plough the fields and scatter
- 413 Now thank we all our God

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)