

Harvest

It's interesting that we can make two words out of Harvest. Share and starve. I would say those two words tell us a lot about harvest.

Jesus never had any big statement to say about harvest, however his life, teachings and sacrifice speak deeply into the meaning of harvest.

He cared for the poor and he demonstrated a sharing life.

On holiday we passed two camels, and their owner was trying to get them down on their knees, so that they could sit down and rest in the midday sun. Their owner had a hard time getting those camels to bend the knee; he would whisper into their ear; he stood and spoke sternly to them; he tried to cajole them with a gently tap on their knees and eventually, against their will, they grudgingly started to collapse onto the ground.

The parable that Jesus told of the camel going through the eye of the needle came to life for me as I watched the camels. Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God."

Cities at that time, were protected by large walls. In the walls, there were small gates and they were referred to as the eye of a needle, which would give entry through the city walls, and the only way that anyone could enter would be to stoop down low and literally crawl on their knees. Jesus said that it is easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter heaven.

He was pointing out the importance of living a life of humility and forgiveness; a life of generosity and compassion; a life where our neighbour's needs are as important as our own.

Harvest is a time that reminds us to enter through the narrow gate; a time to remember to give thanks to God and to be humble about who we are and what we have in life.

However, since the time of Adam and Eve, humans have grasped the forbidden fruit, forgetting that there are consequences to our greed. We have believed that we can have as much as we want. God said, *do not eat from the tree of life* and that's what we've done.

We know that God is good and has created a paradise, and so we have had a belief in a world of endless resources; a world where everyone can have more,

where nothing is rationed or limited. We are, of course, beginning to learn that this isn't the case. The Earth on which we live has limits, our consumption of goods has to slow down. The population throughout the world is rising rapidly, temperature is increasing through the burning of fossil fuels, natural disasters are raging across the world and it is all pointing to disaster unless we can all live more carefully, treasure what we already have, mend and repair rather than throw away; and of course we have to recycle – to reuse materials which we now understand to be finite. This is what our Caring for Creation Team in this church is telling us.

Harvest is a season to reflect, yes, on God's goodness and to be thankful to Him but it is also a time to reflect on our responsibilities towards his generosity, and so being wise stewards, here on earth.

As I said we have no record of Jesus speaking about harvest but he did speak about themes connected to harvest like greed and its consequences.

In our Gospel reading, we have that beautiful and timeless story of the rich young man who came to Jesus asking for the secret to eternal life.

A young man who had a passion for living. He was a model of goodness; he did everything by the book; outwardly he was perfect; inwardly he was a mess.

He was the type of guy that any young girl would love to take home to meet her parents; wealthy, clever, I would expect good looking, but Jesus saw underneath the physical to the spiritual, and Jesus knew that there was something lacking, something missing.

The young man is to be commended, as he was searching for happiness; I'm sure that he saw something in Jesus that he desired – contentment, grace, generosity, peace.

He said "What must I do to receive eternal life?" His first mistake is thinking that it is something that he can do in his own strength and ability. For those who like detail, notice that Jesus responds by telling him to obey the commandments, but notice that Jesus has the commandment, "Honour your father and mother" last. It's in the wrong order – deliberate, yes; I wonder if this young man forgot his parents, whilst he grew rich and his parents were in poverty – who knows? But what we do know is he is a young man unhappy with his lot. He has everything that money can buy and yet yearns for a life of simplicity and peace.

Jesus spoke about money more than any other subject; he put his finger on the young man's problem – like a wise doctor, he diagnosed the issue and it is basically his greed for gold, this had become his god, and the only way the he will find peace is to release his hold on greed. Jesus said, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven and come and follow me.”

A tough challenge. Certainly! This does not mean that every Christian needs to sell everything and give to the poor. There are many wealthy Christians who use their resources wisely.

But Jesus was teaching this young man that the way to Heaven, and the way to God's peace is found in sharing, in giving to those in need. That's the harvest message today.

The young man had to learn how to share the gifts that God blessed him with. He had to learn the message of harvest.

He was of course starving for God's love, and the only way that he would be satisfied was to share the blessings that God gave to him with others.

So, as we look around the world and see the great need that billions face, let us be thankful this harvest that we live in a blessed part of the world. That for many of us, our cups are full and running over; but let us also remember the call from Jesus to give and to share, and to live lives that reflect his sacrifice for others.

Amen and thanks be to God.