

Lord God, bless our Harvest Festival and fix our eyes on the light of Christ. Amen.

- *'The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.'*
- There was a lighthouse on the cliffs. Each evening it's light arced round joyously and reliably, bringing reassurance and stability to both landlubbers and fishing boats as they saw the white beam sweeping thorough the sky. It had been there for the whole of their lives and their parents before them. A sign of safety. A reminder that this was how life should be. It made them feel secure whether they were on the land or the sea.
- Of course few people went near the lighthouse nowadays. It was a long walk round a rough cliff path and the ships didn't actually need it anyway. They had their own super-duper electronic navigation systems with which they were able to plot safe paths through the waters much more accurately. One day, their crews thought, they really must visit it and maybe climb the tower, see the huge lens at the top and take a picture of the view.
- Due to the recession, the lighthouse was now manned by a rota of volunteers who faithfully kept it painted, changed the bulbs, paid the electricity bills and swept the 196 steps to the top each day as they went to check the lamp. It was a hard struggle and they were beginning to wonder whether it was worth the effort. After all they all had other calls on their time and resources.
- One night there was a serious electrical storm. The waves smashed against the rocks and the wind howled as lightning flashed and thunder rolled. It knocked out much of the navigation system equipment so the shipping couldn't receive signals to plot their course.
- Was the lighthouse lamp burning? Where was true security to be found? A sure defence and a true guide?
- It's maybe not hard to see analogies between this story and the Church!
- *'The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.'*
- These words, are from our first reading, St Paul's letter to the muddled Christians at Corinth.
 - The Corinthians, that Church who were so enthusiastic about so many things and so often got it wrong!
- Paul was asking them to join in a collection for the Church in Jerusalem, hundreds of miles away, where there was a severe famine, and people were dying. Paul was going to collect their offering and deliver it back to Jerusalem. That's why he says, *'You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.'*
 - Did they join in with the other churches? Did their lamp shine brightly? We don't have conclusive proof but there is lots of evidence in the book of Acts that they did.
- *'The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.'*
- What do sowing and reaping mean in this context and in our context today?
- Because we're keeping our Harvest Festival today which is all about sowing and reaping,
- But I guess that most people's minds are not particularly focused on giving thanks for the bountiful harvest. This year's Harvest is different from any other I've experienced. We've played down the Harvest offerings of tins in church because of the risk of passing on infection and because many of you will be hearing this online, although over the past year we have been really instrumental in feeding the hungry through the work of the Foodbank and the Corona Support Group. I hope you will also feel moved to support the Christian Aid Harvest Appeal. Once again, the emphasis is on making a donation online for the same reasons. Details are in the pew leaflet.
- This Harvest I guess that many of our minds are more focused upon the effects of climate change and trying to have a responsible attitude to life when we're faced with such extraordinary challenges.
- And I guess that many of us are more focused upon the daily demands of our response to the Corona virus.. How to be safe. Who we can meet, Where we can visit. What we should wear.
- What does sowing and reaping mean in this context? For a lot of the time all that preoccupies our minds to an extraordinary extent and leaves little space to think about spirituality and what it mean to reap God's bounty.
- *'The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.'*

- If sowing is to do with preparing the soil and sprinkling the seed then there's something there about offering, giving of our own resources. The farmer has to buy the seed and prepare the ground and till it before he can sow it. So sowing seems most of all to be about using the resources which God has given us.
- In the parable in St Luke Gospel which we heard this morning, the farmer is wondering what to do with his resources, the crops he has harvested. This is his idea. *'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'* But if we are sowing effectively we shouldn't be storing our resources, we should be using them. There's no point building bigger barns if we are living a life of value because we won't have anything to store. We'll have sowed it all in order to keep the lamp of the lighthouse lit.
- And if we are using our resources in the right way, we are living for Jesus rather than ourselves. It's about putting the emphasis on others rather than ourselves
- About the only thing I know about reaping a harvest is that actually it's jolly hard work. Even today, it's long hours past dark in a combine harvester, and driving back and forth with trucks of grain collected from it. 2 000 years ago it would have been backbreaking. Strive first for the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well. Striving implies hard work! Climb the 196 steps to the top of the lighthouse!
- St Paul is clear what reaping means in his context. Reaping means receiving an awareness of thankfulness. He says, *'for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.'* It really is in giving that we receive.
- Luke is correspondingly clear about the effect of living a life which keeps our resources rather than using them. *'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'* Jesus is calling us to live instead with a healthy view of eternity. What use are resources on earth once we have entered the Kingdom of heaven? Jesus' point is that once we manage to stop doing this, the power balance shifts and we become less concerned with how we're going to survive and more ready to rejoice in the activity of God in the world. And that reduces anxiety and worry.
 - In a world which is much taken up with anxiety and worry, this is good news indeed.
- So Harvest is different this year, but certainly not irrelevant. In fact it is more relevant than ever. For we preach a Gospel, Good News, which is based on Jesus Christ, our risen Saviour, who was never rich in earthly terms, and who was therefore able to face his future with determination and trust as he faced the looming cross which seemed to spell failure and disgrace. He certainly received *'blessings in abundance'* and was quick to share them as the power of his resurrection of the dead began to spread, first with Paul, bringing Good News to the Corinthians and then with Luke as he wrote his Gospel of freedom and Good News to the poor. They also both faced danger and uncertainty but anxiety and worry didn't seem to be part of their daily routine because they were focused on the lighthouse of Christ.
- And we are the physical lighthouse in Baldock. And you will know that the lighthouse is certainly not rich- - heading for a projected £26 000 deficit this year.
- We are in a society which certainly understands what worry and anxiety is all about and has lots of seemingly unsatisfactory ways of dealing with them. It seems only you and I know the way to keep them at bay! Focus on Jesus - an unpopular message as people consult their self help guides, check their bank balances and worry about hidden viruses. What difference can Jesus make! Well, you and I can tell them if the lamp is shining brightly!
- The blessings are already returning. After six days of our planned giving appeal, and twenty or so replies, over £3765 a year has been pledged. Living proof of the reliability of the words of Jesus and the truths in the bible.
- I believe the Church's role over the next few years is going to be more and more vital. I believe physical hunger is going to increase as climate change begins to bite. I believe poverty is on the rise as the recession deepens. I believe people will turn back to the Church as the light that enlightens the world keeps shining.
- So this Harvest, don't forget the Foodbank appeal. Don't forget the Christian Aid Harvest appeal. And please don't forget the Baldock lighthouse, and return your planned giving letters when they arrive, sowing the seed and reaping the blessings, and watch anxiety and worry flow out of the window and in the electrical storm in which we are immersed, keep the light of Christ shining brightly! Live the message! Amen!