

Sermon Harvest Festival 26 Sept 2021- 1 Timothy 6:6-10, Matthew 6:25-33

- If you have been to a funeral recently you might have heard the bible verse 7 in our reading from the letter to Timothy.
- *"for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it"* - but did you know it came from Paul's first letter to Timothy- I admit I didn't !
- We start with zero possessions "We brought nothing into the world" but in the richer global north (like Britain) most of us build up a huge pile of things throughout our lives: money, house, car, jewellery, clothes, special things that mean a lot to us - but everyone knows we can't take them with us when we die -so we can take nothing out of the world ,(unlike the Ancient Egyptians and the Anglo Saxons who had treasures buried with them for their journeys into the next world)
- At the beginning of our lives and the end of our lives we have nothing but ourselves before God, which made me think about all the years in between.
- How much of our life is taken up buying things we would consider basic: like the food and clothing mentioned in the reading? and how much of that is more than we actually really need?
- Perhaps that is what Jesus is saying when he tells us that our Father in heaven knows what we need and will provide it so we shouldn't worry and get anxious.
- Let's trust that God will provide - it might just be that it isn't always the type of food and drink that we want. Sometimes God does remind us, through a health scare, a reaction to overeating or a night on the town that perhaps a more simple diet would be better for us . We have to make hard choices to go against temptation and it's really hard to stay on track, but with support we can achieve great things - with God nothing is impossible.
- I think we often simply just lose touch with that connection to the life-giving Spirit we have felt at significant times on our Christian journey - our coming to faith, a closeness to God at a funeral of a loved one, a Christening of a small child , an uplifting service or a deep time of shared prayer .
- We just spiral ahead with our "normal" lives - getting more things and more expensive and prestigious things, thinking they will bring happiness and fulfilment and by doing that we go further away from the deep love, strength and self-worth that our Christian God is offering us when we turn to Him through His son Jesus.
- God loves each of us more than we can imagine, unconditionally. He loves all His creation- each part of it has a unique and immensely valuable part to play in the grand scheme of things. Everything is in meant to be in balance - humans were not made to be masters of all, wielding power over the vulnerable - humans or other parts of creation - but to be stewards and act in God's image of a caring, inclusive, generous power, loving the world and wanting to see it thrive and be once again in perfect balance.
- Jesus is highlighting this by encouraging us to really take notice and wonder at the beauty of nature around us - today especially we thank God for that goodness and bounty.
- The birds of the air ARE amazing - take a few moments to notice them - the red kites soaring majestically overhead , the noisy sparrows chattering in the hedgerow, even the rather annoying pigeons cooing on top of your house.
- Flowers are so uplifting and beautiful - looking at sunflowers at this time of year always makes me smile and then gaze in awe at the number of seeds in the flowerhead. Just think one single seed grew into this huge plant and produced maybe 100- 200 seeds - wow- then these seeds will feed birds or even humans and some will grow into plants next year: a simple cycle of life and deep connection with other parts of God's creation.

- Surely that gentle balance of working with nature and wondering at the diversity of creation and making huge efforts to save and preserve it for future generations, is what needs to fire us up today because the Climate and Ecological Emergency is massive and real, but a belief and trust in Jesus can transform and empower each one of us to face that challenge rather than bury our heads in the sand.
- Here at St Mary's under the A Rocha Eco Church award scheme which is helping churches tackle the Climate Emergency in 5 areas, we have twinned one of our toilets in a scheme that will enable latrines to be built in a poor part of Nigeria, and we have twinned one of our bins with a rubbish collection and recycling scheme in Haiti (we did this in April) which ties in so well with the monetary harvest appeal we are running to help Haiti in a bigger way. Can you imagine not having a flushing toilet or a regular rubbish collection (let alone a recycling scheme) but just having to let all waste go into the rivers, creating disease and pollution?
- Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world and in a very vulnerable geographical position - they were hit by a massive earthquake in 2010 and then again this year in August by an even larger one, and 2 days later by Tropical Storm Grace, causing flash floods, mudslides and more devastation.
- These people have every right to worry about what they will eat and what they will wear, but we can share our good fortune and help them, responding to God's call to us to love our neighbour wherever they are.
- Climate change is causing more frequent, more extreme weather to occur, sea levels to rise and global temperatures to rise towards dangerous tipping points globally.
- How is God's Holy Spirit prompting you to change the world for the better not just for yourself but for all His creation?
- Perhaps we can look at how we can help those for whom food and clothing is a major issue - it's not just in "the third world" - look at all the food that Marcus Rashford persuaded the government to provide over last year's summer holidays - , look at the fact we are collecting for the Homeless shelters in Hitchin and in Baldock today, we host the Baldock Foodbank - Did you know there are now more Foodbanks than MacDonalDs restaurants in Britain- surely there is something wrong in our society where the rich get richer and the poor rely on handouts or ultra-processed food because that's what's cheapest and easiest for families under pressure... and companies can make vast profits out of ready meals.
- One thing we can do all the time if we can afford it, is to buy FairTrade goods - tea, coffee, bananas, nuts, chocolate-there's lots of chocolate even Kitkats!. Fair Trade gives people in developing countries a fair wage and ability to develop their lives sustainably and it's not just food, but sustainable clothing too. Try buying from Traidcraft or Oxfam.
- So are you up for the challenge of commitment to God's truth, uncomfortable changes in your life to live more simply and to support those much worse off than yourself?
- Are you up for throwing yourself on the amazing and life-giving spirit of Jesus and trusting in him to lead you and comfort you in times of anxiety, pain and trouble and to bring you joy and energy and self worth within a growing Christian community here at St Mary's?
- At our beginning *We brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it* at our end.
- Let's trust even more in God, trust even more in Jesus to show us how to live to achieve true fullness of life and to share God's love with others during the years in between.
- In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen